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SYMBOLISM IN RELIGION, with special reference to Orthodox worship and its relevance for the Free Church tradition.

Robin E. Hutt.

The study begins by considering the nature of symbolism, and various types of symbol. It moves on to examine the power of visual images, and argues that a sense of that power may lie behind the Jewish prohibitions, and partly explain the persistent urge to produce visual images in the Church. The next stage examines visual elements inevitably present in primitive Christianity, such as water in baptism, and the elements and utensils of the eucharist, which carried over Jewish symbolic associations. There follows an examination of the visual images consciously produced, particularly in the catacombs. It is argued that some pictures were felt to acquire a presence of their own, and this led to the development of the icon. The contextual influences in which the use of icons evolved are examined, before tracing the emergence of a theology of the image through the iconoclastic controversies.

Attention moves to a consideration of developments in the West, from Charlemagne's reaction to the Second Council of Nicaea, through an examination of the moral, spiritual and theological influences of the Middle Ages, to the relevant decrees of the Council of Trent. The attitudes of the continental Reformers are discussed, before focussing attention on England. Reference is here made to the Thirty Nine Articles, Henrician iconoclasm, and contemporary arguments.

The need for visual elements in the Free Churches is seen to be met initially in the place of the Bible and the imagery in the hymns of the Evangelical Revival. It is argued that the re-emergence of the image in its own right is a result of a renewed concept of the catholicity of the Church, and the influence of the liturgical and ecumenical movements. Examples are given of visual images in contemporary churches, and of the importance being attached to them. The conclusion suggests that there are pastoral and theological reasons for their re-emergence and continuing place.

SYMBOLISM IN RELIGION, with special reference to
Orthodox worship and its relevance for the Free
Church tradition.

Submitted by Robin Edward Hutt
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in the University of Durham,
Department of Theology. 1985.

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PROLOGUE

So many are the links upon which the true philosophy depends, of which if one is loose or weak, the whole chain is in danger of being dissolved. It is to begin with the hands and eyes, and to proceed on through the memory, to be continued by the reason; nor is it to stop there, but to come to the hands and eyes again.

Robert Hooke Micrographia 1665

Incorporated into the picture Man and Labyrinth by Ben Shahn.

Vatican Museum of Modern Art.



Chapter 1SYMBOLISM - SACRED AND SECULAR

Things are sometimes more than they appear to be. A daffodil for one person may be simply a botanical specimen, for another it could be a beautiful flower, for another it could be an emblem of his home country carrying with it a wide range of emotions arising from his background and experience; and for yet another a sign of new life after winter to be greeted with joy. In the first two instances the flower is a thing, simply taken as itself, but in the last two it directs attention beyond itself, signifying something other than itself: in other words it has become a symbol.

These are commonplace examples of how one thing can stand for another; in this case how a material object can point beyond itself to a range of intangible realities. Visual images, whether material objects taken as given or manufactured; or pictures, diagrams and devices, are part and parcel of our everyday world of communication, and are an important supplement to the spoken and written word. In fact it is difficult to think of any form of communication which is not symbolic to some degree, as we are using media to convey meaning. Words are more than sounds, letters are more than line patterns on a page.

This study, however, is concerned with non-verbal visual images as symbols. It would be helpful to differentiate different types of symbol. Any classification will be somewhat arbitrary, and generalised, there could be endless discussion about the placing of certain examples. However, for the sake of convenient handling one could suggest two broad divisions.

Representational symbols. On the simplest level a salt cellar on the cafe table can stand for the attacker and the ash-tray for the goal in the reconstruction of an incident at the football match. They only work as symbols because both parties agree to



the convention. Many of our traffic signs work in the same way. There is no reason why triangular signs give warnings while circular signs give orders to be obeyed, but it is a useful visual convention. It is the same with red traffic lights. There is no reason why a blue light should not be used to indicate the command to stop, or the presence of a danger. Yet red is the accepted colour, perhaps because of its subconscious association with blood.

We can see with that example a development, a shift to a deeper level. By its widespread acceptance and usage the colour red in certain contexts points beyond itself and the thing so coloured, and in many contexts other than on the highway, red alerts us to danger. Its effectiveness presupposes a common experience or the teaching and assumptions of a common culture which the observers bring to the situation. But it will only remain effective while the convention continues to be accepted. The daffodil will only evoke patriotic emotions in the Welsh so long as it remains the accepted emblem of that country. Paul Tillich has suggested that one of the common characteristics of symbols is that they cannot be created at will, but need the acceptance of a group. (1) Whether that will appear to be true of other kinds of symbols remains to be seen; but it is a characteristic of representational symbols.

Analogical symbols. In this category certain characteristics of one object are used to illustrate or express equivalent characteristics in another. These symbols vary from being very concrete to being more abstract. Obvious concrete examples can be taken once more from the common traffic signs. The diagram of the skidding car is not in itself a skidding car, still less is it me skidding, but it looks like it and therefore warns me of the danger of skidding at that point of the journey. Any pictorial

representation, if it is in any way life-like, is the same. It does not have to be agreed by common consent, as is the case with round or triangular signs, it has within it that which coincides with something in our memory and experience, and in the real world. So we are not looking at lines and colours in themselves, but as depicting a bridge or a bush or a budgerigar. In these cases the characteristics of colour and depicted shape express the equivalent characteristics in the object referred to. The same is true of many diagrams and graphs. The up and down movement of the line on the graph reflects the equivalent up and down fluctuations of temperature.

Analogical symbols are also used to express and communicate abstract qualities. A jaguar, with its qualities of grace, beauty and controlled power, is used to symbolise what are claimed to be similar qualities in a particular make of motor car. Advertising is full of examples of things that have dependable, exciting, wholesome, caring qualities being used to point to equivalent qualities in the products they are commending.

It is tempting to include a third category:

Natural symbols. These are not manufactured or agreed by a community but their existence and recognition inevitably directs attention beyond themselves. Such a thing, in St. Augustine's words "... causes something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself." (2) He goes on to give the example of smoke in relation to fire, and an animal's footprint in relation to that animal's passing by. To be sure, for Robinson Crusoe the discovery of a human footprint in the sand evoked more than an interest in its form and outline; and one could imagine campers in the African bush feeling more than idle curiosity on waking up to discover large paw prints round their tents.

Augustine uses the term "signa naturalia" to describe such things, while what we have called representational and analogical symbols he calls "signa data" - signs people make to each other to indicate what they feel, perceive or understand. Although the word "signa" is used in both cases it is widening the definition of "symbol" too far to include this third category, which is better thought of in terms of "symptom" or "evidence" or indeed of "sign". Although it shares with the other two categories the quality of pointing beyond itself it differs in an important respect. Such signs are not consciously chosen to represent what they point to, for there is no choice about the matter: a genuine paw-print points to a genuine animal. To observe the sign and to point it out to another does not of itself communicate what the individual feels about the things signified, there is no analogical content which could help people think beyond the animal, or to ponder its qualities.

A symbol, therefore, is a product of the human mind and imagination. It is consciously chosen or made, to communicate knowledge or experience or feeling relating to something other than itself. Adopting the symbol helps people to articulate their response to and understanding of experience, often more fully and deeply than by using words. This is because the symbol can evoke from the observer a shared experience. One person hoisting a national flag to the top of a flag-pole (i.e. using a symbolic article in a symbolic way) can awaken latent patriotic feelings in another.

Religion is full of symbolism in its language and its artefacts, and particularly in the sphere of its worship and devotion. How far are religious symbols the same as other symbols, and how far do they differ?

Representational religious symbols. Many obvious examples come from church architecture. Three steps from nave to chancel may be said to remind worshippers of the three Persons of the Trinity. It may not have been in the mind of the architect but once suggested becomes symbolic on this rather superficial level. Anything with four obvious divisions, like the sides of a square font, or four steps into the pulpit, can be used as a representational symbol of the four gospels. Numbers are easily incorporated in this kind of symbolism: twelve windows in the clerestory represent the twelve Apostles, five crosses carved on the altar represent the five wounds of Christ. One could go on ad infinitum.

Other examples can be drawn from ritual actions.




We make the sign of the cross when we pray. To make it we join the tips of our thumb and first two fingers of our right hand, in memory of the Holy Trinity, and bend the third and little fingers to the palm, in order to express our faith that Jesus was true God and true man.

So reads a simple companion to the Orthodox Liturgy. (3)

None of these examples is of quite as arbitrary a nature as that of the salt-cellar representing the footballer, although using the third and little finger to remind us that Jesus was truly God and truly man is very close. There is at least a common element in the numbers. The nearest we get is perhaps in liturgical colours representing the seasons of the Church year. There seems no obvious reason why green should be the colour for the non-specific days after Epiphany and after Trinity, but so it generally is in the Catholic tradition. Red for the feast days of Apostles, evangelists and martyrs, and the veiling of images in Lent have more obvious significance to them.

As with the secular examples some religious representational symbols carry with them a shift to a deeper level. Twelve pillars supporting the roof of a mighty cathedral may have been originally

an architectural necessity, but once having been designated as representing the twelve Apostles, the essential supportive strength of the pillars will be carried over into the symbol by analogy, as well as the simple numerical equation. It will have become more than a mere illustration or aide memoire, for it will express an interpretation of, or a response to, the place of the Apostles in the life of the Church. The imagination can be stirred, and much more is said than that there were twelve of them.

One can see a similar shift in two of the most well known early symbolic devices of the Church. The chi-rho  taken from the first two letters of Christos is almost the equivalent of the modern identifying logo from the world of advertising; but the cruciform shape, albeit canted over, with a rho  visually resembling a shepherd's crook, suggests the cross, shepherd and lamb images that work very deeply in Christian experience. The other device is the fish - . The supposed origin from ichthus is well known, but the fish of the great feeding, and the fish of Jonah as the figure of the resurrection, are also close to the surface.

And of course a church building itself can be a representational symbol, as if we are saying, "Let this building stand for the presence of God in our midst". This is what the Jews said of the Temple, ('the place where the Lord sets his name' 1 Kings 8:29, Dt.12:11) and we are impelled to go on to say that it should therefore express the right things about God, about his relationship to the world and to mankind.

That can only happen when visual elements in the building and obvious characteristics of the activities associated with it can by analogy communicate an understanding of God and express a response. We are now in the area of

Analogical Religious Symbols. The architect of Liverpool

Metropolitan Cathedral has stated very simply that a cathedral "ought to be an expression of man's belief in God."(4) This theme is developed by F. W. Dillistone in "Traditional Symbols and the Contemporary World". In a chapter on symbolic structures of space he quotes Bonhoeffer:

"It is essential to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that he occupies space in the world.... The Church of Jesus Christ is the place, in other words, the space in the world, at which the reign of Jesus Christ over the whole world is evidenced and proclaimed."(5)

In his design of the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, Gibberd deliberately sets the Crown symbol over the high altar as the most significant place inside the building. He also speaks of cathedrals as the "crown to the urban composition."(6) That says something of the relation of God to the world and, as many cathedrals appear to rise out of their environment and reach upwards, speaks also of man's relationship to God. Dillistone takes this line of thought to logical and disturbing conclusion:

"A church, if it is a true symbol, provides a model of how man's activities towards God and his neighbour can be symbolically co-ordinated.... A church building then should live in relationship to its environment and if it becomes plain that no such relationship any longer exists it should be destroyed: the witness to death and resurrection applies to buildings as well as to men."(7)

A similar understanding of architecture has been applied to secular buildings. Civic buildings are consciously designed to express and evoke civic pride. Although some buildings seem designed to keep people out (the dark-brick, slit-eyed block which is Steel House at Redcar deserves its local nickname of Alcatraz), there is a school of modern architecture which says that buildings are made for man, and "man must flow into his surroundings and his surroundings, including his buildings, must be such as to expand and quicken his total life."(8)

However the Church existed 300 years before specifically-

designed church buildings were erected and much of the symbolism we are familiar with today has roots in the earliest Christian tradition.

Christianity, and the Hebrew religion from which it developed, are essentially religions of response to experience. Things happened in the history of the people which evoked a religious response. The Exodus was the most formative experience for the Jews; the impact of Jesus of Nazareth, especially the manner of his death and the experiences of the following few weeks, was the most formative for the Christians.

Memories of these experiences were preserved in such a way as to contain the people's responses to them. So the stories were recalled by narration and drama in the context of worship, which itself was part of the response. The point of doing that was both to maintain an attitude of praise and also to initiate the succeeding generations into the original experiences and thus evoke the appropriate response. It was a way of bringing the past into the present and so to be made aware of the continuing saving presence of God. Later the stories, with their interpretive response which was recognised as part of the truth of the events, were written down. Although there were clear instructions not to make images of God, and in the Hebrew tradition a strong bias against any form of static visual representation, it was inevitable that visual motifs developed. Illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, and the famous ruins of the synagogue at Dura Europus near Damascus, destroyed in 257, provide illustrations from the Jewish tradition,(9) but the development was much more widespread in Christianity.

Sources of Christian visual images. In Christianity the visual images grew from two sources: the events themselves, and verbal images contained in scripture.

A picture of the Crucifixion or of Christ performing a miracle could have the same function as the verbal narration of the event. But elements could come into the picture which would be difficult to put into the narrative, and the illustration would thus develop a deeper symbolism. A picture of the crucifixion "as it happened" has symbolic value of course. The picture points beyond its form and colour to Calvary, and that points beyond itself to the saving act of God in Christ. The second step presupposes extra knowledge and experience in the beholder: that God was intimately involved in the crucifixion, that it was a divine event. That response can be incorporated into the picture in a variety of ways. The presence of angels is an obvious symbolic device; more subtly the figure of Christ can by form, or colour, or facial expression be given an ethereal quality, and if this is contrasted sharply with the harsh realism of the soldiers, the nails and the rest of the surroundings the message is clear. For those who share the belief, the symbol can evoke an appropriate response. The balance between symbolic expression and visual illustration varies. Some crucifixion pictures, and even more particularly statues, seem a long way from what a neutral observer would have seen. Yet for them to function symbolically they need to have some visual connection with the original event which some saw merely as the execution of a heretic.

The events associated not only with Jesus, but also with his most noted followers, the apostles and martyrs, were a rich source of Christian symbolic expression.

Other visual symbolic images are really verbal images in pictorial form and come from the scriptures. The Shepherd is an obvious example (Ezek 34 : 11), the King is another (Psalm 74: 12). Analogies of Jesus in John's Gospel such as wine, water, light,

bread are another source of inspiration for visual symbols. The liturgy, itself a highly symbolic activity, provided material for subsequent visual symbolism, and in particular the practice of sacrifice. With sacrifice expressing so much of man's relationship to God, and God's to the world, and having such a long tradition in Hebrew religion, it was inevitable that the significance of Jesus was expressed in terms of sacrifice and its accompanying ritual.

The letter to Hebrews is full of it, and Paul speaks of "Christ our passover, sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5 : 7). Within that context the picture of the Lamb is pre-eminent. The pure unblemished lamb is innocent, yet slaughtered: the sacrifice of the lamb effects the forgiveness of sins. So Christ is "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the World", he is the "lamb upon the throne" in Revelation.

The development of these visual religious symbols, arising from past experience and from verbal images, and pointing by analogy to someone or something beyond them, can be paralleled in the secular world.

Events in the history of a nation in which some ideal defining quality of the people is expressed, becomes preserved and brought into common parlance. So in Britain we speak of the "Dunkirk spirit" to symbolise the qualities of courage, determination and co-operation which we like to believe are the truly British characteristics. The exploits of the navy under Nelson provide similar symbolic material and the figure of Britannia clearly ruling the waves on generations of pennies was an evocative symbol. It is often the case that the events which bolster up national pride or show "the enemy" in a bad light, and the heroic leaders in war, politics or science, are taught and remembered

and used as symbols of the nation's belief about its true nature.

The same is true of the verbal analogies of national pride. It is perhaps the secularisation of animism when nations use animal symbols. The bulldog, the lion and the eagle, all say things by analogy of a people's understanding of itself, or its aspirations.

In all this a question emerges. If symbolism of architectural design works in a similar way for sacred and secular buildings, and if the symbols of identity and self-understanding work similarly in sacred and secular life, is there anything distinctive and unique about religious symbols as such?

The Uniqueness of Religious Symbols. Dorothy Emmet suggests that transcendence is an essential element of religious symbolism, which "... grows out of the feeling of the 'otherness' of a transcendent which exists in its own right, beyond our experience." (10) It can be said that some secular symbolism grows out of a feeling of "otherness": the "other" being the state or the people. It is that which exists over and above the sum total of the parts. We idealise it, we attribute to it a life of its own. Yet if you remove the individual people the nation is dead. The uniqueness of religious symbolism is the same as the uniqueness of religion itself: that is that it claims to point to the "other" which exists "... in its own right beyond our experience". The word that is used for the "other" is God, and God's existence, religion claims, is not dependent on man.

The difficulty is that we cannot have direct and immediate access to him or contact with him; he is always mediated through our senses and our experiences within the physical world which provide the raw materials for our imagination. Religious symbols therefore are "pointers to a meaning they cannot contain". (11)

Joseph Gelineau (12) describes a symbol as that which brings together and makes connections. What makes a symbol religious is

that it expresses on the one hand something grasped in everyday experience, and on the other a response to something other, which is distinct and self-existent, that is, to God. The symbol brings the two experiences of reality together.

There are inevitable limitations and ambiguities. The symbol may evoke different responses in different people, or from the same person at different times. It may not be possible to express those responses in words. Indeed if that were possible the symbol would be redundant, or reduced to a mere sign. The symbol can die when in the course of time it loses touch with everyday experience. It remains a living symbol so long as it evokes a sense of God's presence, or elicits a response which is appropriate to God's presence.

Symbols express experiences, convictions, feeling states. They are not what they point to. Religious symbols claim to be a response to a transcendent independent reality who cannot be directly known. Theology tries to translate the symbols into a coherent thought-form, and so to attempt to order them in relation to the rest of human experience. Whether the truth-claim of religious symbolism can be sustained is a question for theology and philosophy. Our concern is with the way symbols relate to and communicate the experiences and convictions behind them, and not with the validity of the convictions. About the latter there will be differences of opinion, as for instance between those who claim the symbols point outwardly to reality beyond the individual and those who say that they are an expression of inner feelings and nothing more. But the arguments do not alter the fact that the symbols exist, and those to whom they mean most find them indispensable means of expressing their deepest conviction. "... Religion loses its nerve when it ceases to believe that it expresses in

some way truth about our relation to a reality beyond ourselves which ultimately concerns us". (13)

Chapter 2THE INHERITANCE

The primitive power of the image. The urge to paint, draw, and carve seems to have been part of human make-up from earliest days. Cave paintings like those of Altrimira, beautifully executed, and full of life, going back perhaps 30,000 years, are evidence of this. It is not possible to say for certain what the motives for such paintings were. It is commonly suggested that they could not have been purely decorative, as the demands on people simply to survive were such as to give no time for "art for art's sake". This is supported by the remote location of the most ancient paintings, discovered last century, in caves in France and Spain. E.H.Gombrich puts it very simply: "One thing is clear, no one would have crawled so far into the eerie depth of the earth simply to decorate such an inaccessible place."(14) The most simple explanation, supported by evidence from primitive communities today, is that the art was functional, and that its purpose was to exercise some control over the environment. In the case of the cave paintings, with their impressive representations of animals such as bulls, bison, horses, rheindeer and the like, it was probably to secure an abundance of game, and to influence the outcome of the hunt. If the hunters could draw a picture of their prey being hunted and caught, the real animals might succumb to their power.

If this theory is correct, we have here an example of the widespread belief in the power of picture and image-making, the belief that the visual representation participates in the life of what it represents, and thus the image brings its object under some measure of control. Such understanding still survives today. Gombrich quotes the case of a European artist who visited an African village to make drawings of their cattle. The villagers were distressed as the artist made to leave with the pictures: "If you take them away,

what are we to live on?".(15) Explorers and anthropologists report the dislike some tribal peoples have of being photographed, as possession of the photograph could give some controlling power over the people depicted. Some Black Magic rites illustrate the same principle, when a doll representing a particular person is pierced with pins in an attempt to inflict pain or even death on that person.

We can easily sense this power ourselves. We can draw a simple face with a round head, and two simple lines for the nose and mouth.



Our eye-less doodle looks sad. The poor thing cannot see, so we feel we must give it eyes. With relief we put in two dots, and feel better that it can now see. Our "doodle" has become a person. This is trivial and light-hearted of course but to our ancient ancestors and to some of our contemporaries it is not. A wooden pole to which one has given a simple face is now quite transformed, and the artist or the viewer may take that transformation and the impression it makes on him as a token of its magic powers. It now has a life of its own. If it resembles someone or something specific it takes on part of that life. A similar thing can occur when we make a puppet or doll. There comes a point when one feels that it is now something more than material and stuffing; it assumes a presence, and it may take a conscious intellectual effort to counteract the impression. If someone comes into our house and disfigures a picture of someone we love or admire we will probably be angry, and may even feel that the "wounds" on the picture are felt by them. It is an absurd feeling which our conscious logic rejects, but about which we can still feel uneasy. It has even been reported that in some Japanese

factories there are rooms containing inflatable effigies of managers, for workers to be able to vent their spleen on and release a great deal of pent-up aggression towards them. Apparently it enables discussions to be less heated. It was not stated whether the management had similar facilities. This may seem to be a joke, or a psychological ploy; but it touches something that is deeply rooted.

Jewish prohibitions. The veneration of images, and the beliefs about their relation to the god or spirit they represent, clearly spring from the same root, which may be at the back of the injunction in Exodus 20 : 4 (repeated in six other places):

"You shall not make a carved image for yourself, nor the likeness of anything in the heavens above or in the earth below, or in the waters under the earth."

The Hebrews gradually developed an understanding of the unique, unapproachable sovereignty of Yahweh. An image of him, with the suggested possibility of a measure of control, was an intolerable limitation of his sovereignty; and an image of other gods was a violation of his claim upon them of exclusive worship and a denial of his promise of sufficient protection and blessing. The Exodus prohibition may also, in early Hebrew history, have had an element of protection in it. To make an image of a god could equally well facilitate his control over them: for the image would bring him into their presence with unknown powers. It could be said of course that they would scarcely have wanted to make such an image unless they felt themselves already to be under the god's influence, or wanted to avail themselves of it. The real danger, in the eyes of the primitive ancestors of the Hebrews, may have been in the accidental introduction of the god by casual drawing or carving in which the unintended likeness is formed. That is, of course, pure speculation; but it is consistent with the general principle.

By the beginning of the Christian era the second commandment

seems to have been less rigidly interpreted in some Jewish quarters. Synagogue walls were decorated with pictures, as were the Jewish catacombs in Rome. Some Hebrew manuscripts were illuminated, and it has been suggested that the Septuagint, in its final form; was illustrated.(16) This may have been due to Gentile influence in the diaspora, and it may be significant that inscriptions in the synagogue at Dura Europus are in Persian and not Hebrew. It is very probable that such paintings were to decorate, or to teach the non-literate, or to encourage emulation of some virtue. It may be that some were intended to evoke worship and thanksgiving as Yahweh's mighty deeds were brought to mind. It is a far cry from the cave paintings of Altamira: yet if we can sense, even but dimly, what was felt to be the magical power in the visual image, then we must assume that people could sense it two thousand years ago. The tendency of people to focus their devotion on the depiction, or to ascribe certain powers directly to it, and the opposing anxiety that that is what people will do, never seems entirely to have disappeared. The iconoclastic controversies, and the Reformation reaction against images, are evidence of it in the history of the Church; and it is not far below the surface in parts of the Church today. Neither has the desire and urge to produce or adopt visual images disappeared from Christian devotion and worship.

Visual elements present in early christian worship. The early Christians certainly made visual representations. They painted pictures, constructed mosaics and carved reliefs. But in addition there were visual elements inevitably present in their rituals which carried with them a whole body of associations and symbolic power, and which are still present in the Church today. These were the water of baptism, the bread and wine of the eucharist,

and the communal meal which was its form. In trying to discern the meaning and effectiveness of Christian symbols, and their place within the worship of the Church, these elements also have to be considered. No attempt will be made to expound the doctrines of baptism or the eucharist, or to describe the development of their place within the life of the Church, except in so far as it may help to illuminate the symbolic value of their visual constituents.

In baptism. Baptism in the early Church was associated with entry into the Church, with the forgiveness of sins, and with the reception of the Holy Spirit. The people who reacted positively to Peter's preaching at Pentecost were told: "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the Holy Spirit." According to the author of Acts "...those who received his word were baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 22 : 38, 41, 42). Within the baptismal rite water is the essential component. What associations did water carry for the first worshippers, and how does its presence relate to the three elements of entry into the Church, forgiveness, and receiving the Holy Spirit?

Water carried (and still carries) associations both of death and of life. These can be clearly seen in two important stories in Jewish tradition: the Flood and the Exodus. The waters of the Flood overwhelm evil, but also support the chosen survivors who are saved to make a new beginning. The waters of the Red Sea destroy the Egyptian army, but are also the means of Israel's escape. Both events are associated with a covenant between God and those he has rescued.

By its very nature water is frequently used as an image of death

and judgement (Isa 8: 5-8 in which Assyria is spoken of as a river which will overwhelm Judah because they have "...refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently".), and also as an image of fruitfulness and life. The story of God guiding Moses to strike water from the rock in the wilderness is an important source of symbolic association. The water was essential for life ("Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" Ex 17 : 3) and its provision was a confirming sign of the Covenant ("Take heed lest you forget the Lord your God ... who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, and who brought you water out of the flinty rock" Dt 8 : 11, 15). The picture is taken up by Paul as a symbol of Christ, the source of the water of life (cf 1 Cor 10 : 1), and it features in early Christian paintings in the Catacombs. (see fig x p.52) Water as a source of fruitfulness and life is expressed graphically in Ezekiel's vision of water flowing from the Temple to renew the barren land around it, causing trees to grow whose "fruit shall be for food and leaves for healing" (Ezek 47 : 12). It is a simple progression from seeing God as the source of fruitfulness (the water comes from the sanctuary) to speaking of God as "the fountain of living water" (Jer 17 : 13 cf. also Jer 2 : 13, Ps 36 : 8-9).

There is another route by which water comes to be a symbol of God himself. Water is a means of cleansing in a literal sense. It became a symbol of ritual cleansing, making it possible for someone to approach God once more. Such ritual cleansing had become highly developed in Judaism as can be seen from the regulations for cleansing in the Book Leviticus (see for example chapter 15), and it was an essential part of the life of the Qumran community, both at initiation (people must "enter the water to partake of the pure meal

of the saints") (17) and as an essential element in rites of purification ("And when his flesh is sprinkled with the purifying water and sanctified by cleansing water, it shall be made clean by the humble submission of his soul to all the precepts of God") (18)

The prophets warned against seeing the cleansing rites in purely external terms. They reminded people that it was sin which really rendered a man unclean, and true cleansing was a fruit of repentance and the receiving of forgiveness. The vivid picture in Amos of justice 'rolling down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream' (5 : 24) carries with it the image of water which not only overwhelms the evil of those who offer the externals of sacrifice while maintaining corrupt practices, but also thereby effects cleansing. It is like the passage in Isaiah : "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good..."(1: 16). John the Baptist appears to stand in this tradition, "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1 : 4).

As forgiveness is the sole prerogative of God ("Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Mark 2 : 7) water came to be the symbol of God the Holy Spirit bringing new life. This is developed in the New Testament, with the association of the Holy Spirit with baptism, and is stated clearly in John in the conversation with Nicodemus, with the woman at the well of Sychar, and in chapter 7 where his reference to "rivers of living water" is followed by: "This he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive." v 39.

"Living water" is a Hebrew idiom which refers to water that is moving, as opposed to water that is still. Flood waters, rivers, springs, fountains would all be "living water", whereas well-water, or water in pots, would not. The water which becomes a symbol of

God's judging, saving, forgiving, creating activities is always living water. This is almost certainly behind the rubrics stipulating that the water of Christian baptism should be moving, which, as pointed out by Daniélou, go back at least to the time of Didache, and the Apostolic Tradition. (19) It is now possible to see how the water in christian baptism relates to the sacrament's main themes.

a) Entry into the Church: This followed a believing response to the preaching of the Gospel, and was an outward expression of commitment to Christ and incorporation into the body of Christian believers. Paul speaks of the Christian believer as a member of the new Israel (Gal 6 : 16) (20) as one who inherits the promise of the Covenant (Rom 9 : 6); and is saved by the sacrifice of Christ the Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5: 7). The water of baptism then assumes almost the equivalence of the waters of the Red Sea, with its associations of passing from bondage into freedom and the establishment of the Covenant (cf. Rom 8 : 15), and the waters of the Jordan, through which they passed into the land of promise. There were occasions when the water was made to move by being passed along channels into a basin or pool. In such cases the symbol of Christ the "Rock from which the living waters flow" would have been fairly strong. That too had its links with the Covenant, and was appropriate for Baptism, which was entry into the New Covenant through faith in Christ.

b) The forgiveness of sins: Repentance and new beginnings were central to John's baptism, and closely linked with Jewish purification rites. Natural associations with washing have already been noted. The significant difference between Christian baptism and washing in the waters of Jewish purification was that Christian baptism was once and for all, with no need for repetition, whereas Jewish rites required regular administration. To repeat Christian baptism would have been seen as a denial of God's unconditional acceptance of the

convert, and the eternal nature of Christ's atoning work. So radical is the change implicit in the new beginning, that the New Testament speaks of it in terms of new life, dying and rising with Christ (2 Cor 5 : 17; 1 Pet 1 : 3; John 3:1-6; Rom 6 : 3-5). With this understanding of Baptism, the waters of immersion easily come to symbolise death, out of which the candidate rises to new life (cf. Rom 6 "... all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death..."). Pictures of the waters of the Flood and the waters of the Exodus very quickly come to mind. The waters of baptism can also suggest the waters of birth, "uterine waters of a new birth" as one writer has described them.(21) It is also clear that very deeply rooted associations of water and the unconscious, and water and primordial chaos are stirred and evoked at this point.

c) The coming of the Holy Spirit: Water and Spirit are directly linked in the creation story of Genesis 1, where the Spirit of God brings order and new life from the watery void. The Spirit and the dove are linked in the New Testament in the baptism of Jesus, and that would waken echoes of the Flood, and the dove bringing the signs of imminent salvation to Noah. This is used as a typological reference to baptism in 1 Pet 3 : 20-21, where the emphasis is on the Christian passing through the water of baptism into safety as Noah and his companions "... were saved through the water." Early sarcophagus reliefs, with their stylised forms of the ark, portray the dove in a way which would inevitably speak of the Spirit.

There are other biblical references to water which are related to the themes within baptism, and find their place in Christian iconography. One can conveniently put them into two groups. In the first are references concerned with water as symbolising death and chaos from which we can be saved by the power of God. In the Psalms

God controls the raging of the seas (e.g. Psa 65 : 7; 77 : 19). In the Gospels Jesus stills the storm (Mark 4) and walks on the water (Mark 6); and one finds a picture of heaven in the Book of Revelation in which "... there shall be no more sea." (Rev 21 : 1). In the second group there is the picture of fruitfulness in Ezekial 47 (echoed in Rev 22), already noted, and also frequent references to the presence or absence of water (a vital commodity for all people) as a sign of God's pleasure or displeasure. All these references can be used as motifs of salvation, forgiveness, and restoration of a renewed Israel; and be easily applied to Christian baptism.

The Eucharist. The eucharist was celebrated far more often than baptism was administered, and was from the first the central act of Christian worship. Its main themes were anamnesis or remembrance, the new covenant, fellowship, and the foretaste of the messianic banquet; its atmosphere was predominantly one of thanksgiving; and its main constituents, which were to provide a pattern of symbols for Christian art and literature, were bread, wine mixed with water (with its related symbol of the fish), the cup and the communal meal.

The Bread. Although the bread of the eucharist may have been unleavened - though the Greek word ἄζυρος means leavened bread - there is a primary association of bread with the staple necessity of life. There are occasions in the Old Testament for instance when bread stands for food in general (e.g. Lev 3 : 11; Gen 3 : 19). It was inevitable that something of such vital importance for man's well-being was used in sacrifices, not only by the Jews but generally in the ancient world. An interesting example comes from Delos, where according to a statement ascribed to Aristotle there was an altar dedicated to Apollo, the Giver of Life, on which only flour, meal and loaves could be offered.(22) If, as was often the case, the offering of this sacrifice carried with it the sense of its

bringing life to the one offering it, it makes it a potentially significant example which may possibly have influenced the way some Hellenistic converts regarded the eucharistic bread, assuming that such sacrificial usage was known in the 1st century AD. A clear example of the relationship between the bread offered and the life of the giver is found in an inscription of the 4th century BC. at Piraeus, which includes instructions concerning the amounts of bread to be offered to various gods for recovery from illness.(23) Summing up a long and detailed consideration of bread offerings, E.R.Goodenough suggests that:

The ceremonial significance of bread offerings had a great history. Throughout Greco-Roman history bread or cakes had deep sanctity, and we must presume that the element of communion, at least in the sense that the gods eat with the sacrificants, was usually felt.(24).

If this is true, bread would have been a powerful symbol for gentiles in the context of Christian worship, even if they were ignorant of Jewish traditional beliefs.

But there were also specifically Jewish associations that the first Christians would have brought to the bread of the eucharist. Provision of bread was a sign of God's favour;

"I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread". (Ps 132 : 15)

Bread which is given without need of money or effort is a sign of the covenant-love of God, like the manna miraculously provided in the desert (cf. Ex 16).

Unleavened bread was offered, with other things, in the sacrificial rituals for consecrating priests, where it is referred to, with flesh offerings, as "those things with which atonement was made" (Ex 29 : 33). The flesh and bread were to be eaten by those who were consecrated, but not by "outsiders". One can see certain parallels here with the eucharist as the meal of those who are

consecrated as a "royal priesthood", set apart as a "holy nation", whose Lord is seen as "the great High Priest".

Bread is also associated with the first-fruits, which in Judaism had not only been seen as a thank-offering and dedication of the harvest, but as offerings which signified God's offer of salvation and immortality. Thus baskets of fruit and baskets of loaves appear on Jewish tombstones. It may be significant that the bread of Elisha's feeding miracle, so clearly akin to the great feeding of John 6, was "bread of the first-fruits". (II Kings 4 : 42-44)

Perhaps the most and powerful allusion was to the manna. There was in Judaism an expectation of a second manna-miracle performed by the Messiah;

"As the first Redeemer caused manna to descend, so shall the last Redeemer cause manna to descend". (25)

The Gospel of John makes plain the links between the bread of the eucharist, the manna, and Jesus, in the discourse in chapter 6;

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. (John 6 : 49-51)

There are echoes there also of the symbolism of the life-giving first-fruits, and of Jesus the new Moses, mediating a new covenant.

An interesting example of the way this sort of symbolism was taken into Christian iconography comes from the Coptic church. Bread had come to be represented as a circle or round object. The Copts adapted the Egyptian ankh, the sign of life (fig.i) by replacing the loop with the circle (fig.ii), thereby making it speak of Christ as

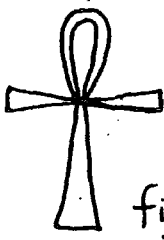


fig. i

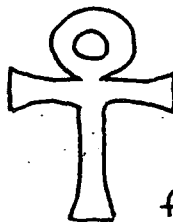


fig. ii

the giver of life, and, so far as the circle was also seen to

represent the sun, as giver of light.(26)

The Wine. Wine symbols such as bunches of grapes, vines, and cups, were commonly used from the time of the Maccabees. There are three forms of their appearance which may be significant. The coins of the first Jewish Revolt A.D. 66-70, and of the revolt under Bar Cochba A.D. 132-5, carried vine symbols. One may assume that under such circumstances emblems would be chosen that clearly represented Israel. The vine may have been chosen because of its use in the prophets and psalms:

"Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt; thou didst drive out the nations and plant it." (Ps 80 : 8, cf. also Isa 5 : 7. Hos 10 : 1)

From sources as widely varying as Tacitus, the Mishnah and Josephus, it appears that the vine was prominently represented in Herod's temple. Josephus describes it as "... a golden vine with pendant bunches of grapes, a creation which was a marvel to those who saw it for its size and craftsmanship, as well as for the costliness of its material". (27) In the light of that it is interesting to note that in the synagogue at Dura, set prominently above the ark of the Torah, was a picture which, although not easy to distinguish in all its details, showed a large vine, and a table equipped with bread, a banqueting cushion and at least one wine bowl.

The third occurrence of wine symbols was on funerary ornaments. They are very common and widespread, and suggest a link with hopes of immortality, and perhaps participation in the messianic banquet.

On the principle that if something is depicted in a ritual setting, it is also used in that setting, the natural assumption is that there was a ritual drinking of wine which was of great importance. The picture at Dura points in that direction. What that ritual implied would be difficult to determine. It might have been a form of participating in the true vine, that is saved and redeemed Israel. That would make the appearance of wine symbols on and within tombs

appropriate. It might perhaps allude to the Passover meal, which would have much the same implications of being part of the true Israel, saved by the covenant love of God. It would also carry with it the anticipation of the eschatological meal.

The messianic and eschatological references of the vine and vineyard images are taken up in the New Testament in the parable of the vineyard (Mark 12 : 1-11) and in the discourse on the True Vine (John Ch.15). That such references were to be associated with the wine of the eucharist is indicated by the fact that in the synoptic accounts of the Last Supper the phrase "the fruit of the vine" is used instead of the word "wine", which Jesus will not drink again until "this passover" is "fulfilled in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 22:18). This is born out by the early eucharistic instruction in the Didache which runs:

Concerning the eucharist, give thanks in this way, 'We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David thy servant, which thou madest known through thy servant Jesus'.(28)

This seems to carry the thought of the Church as the true vine, the new Israel, revealed through Jesus, and instituted in the eucharist.

About wine itself Jewish feelings were ambivalent, and reflect its effects. It can bring pleasure, conviviality, and a sense of well-being; it can also make a fool of a man as it sends him giddy, it can make him violent and destructive, and it can enslave him. So it is seen on the one hand as a good gift of God to gladden the heart (Ps. 104 : 14-15); and on the other it is a sign of decadence. Hence the existence of the Rechabites and the Nazirites, who abstained from wine, and the castigations of Amos on the "cows of Bashan" who lie around in luxury all day, saying to their husbands, "Bring me a drink" (Amos 4).

So wine is used metaphorically in relation to what is desirable: reconciliation with God (Isa 55 : 1); with reference to the fulfilment of God's purpose (Isa 25 : 6: "On this mountain the Lord of Hosts

will make for all people a feast ... of wine on the lees"); and as a symbol of the benefits of divine wisdom (Prov 9 : 5). It is also used for what is undesirable, referring to God's anger and punishment (Ps 60 : 3: "Thou hast made thy people suffer hard things; thou hast given us wine to drink that has made us reel."); and to the evil influence of Babylon (Jer 51 : 7: "Nations drink of her wine, therefore the nations went mad." (cf. also Isa 63 : 1-6, Rev 14 : 9-20)

There were some associations of wine with blood. Mt. 32 : 14 refers to it as the "blood of the grape", presumably a reference to its colour. (cf. Gen 49 : 11) Apparently in Babylon it was felt that in producing wine the grapes were crushed in a suffering and painful death, which thought may have found its way into Jewish thinking.(29) Ben Sirach describes the high moment of a sacrifice offering by the High Priest Simeon, son of Jochanan, early in the second century B.C. as follows:

Until he had finished the service of the altar
 And arranging the rows of wood of the Most High
 (And) stretched forth his hand to the cup,
 And poured out the blood of the grape,
 Yea, poured (it) out at the foot of the altar,
 A sweet-smelling savour to the Most High, the All-King.(30)

With blood and wine both being used in sacrifice there would have been a natural coming together of symbolic association, so although the original cup saying in the Last Supper may have connected the cup of blessing after supper with the new covenant, with no emphasis on identifying the wine with the blood, it was almost inevitable that the bread and the cup sayings were brought together, and the wine linked with the blood of Christ. That coming together would also have been assisted by the fact that the Christian eucharist was not a copy of the form of the Jewish Passover meal, so the sharing of the bread and the wine would have had no long gap separating them. This being so, the wine would have carried some of the blood-symbolism, relating it to the life of the sacrificial victim. This is brought

Out most clearly by reference to the covenant sacrifice described in Exodus chapter 24 in which the blood of the sacrifice is sprinkled on the altar and on the people. The power of that symbolic act would lie in the understanding that God and his people have become bound together in the blood of the sacrificial victim. There is possibly a direct reference to that in the words ascribed to Jesus in Matthew 26 : 28 "This is my blood of the New Covenant" and an ironic allusion to it in the words of the crowd on Good Friday: "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27 : 25).

The Fish. At first sight there seems to be no relation between fish and wine; yet the discourse in the sixth chapter of St John's Gospel, which is generally taken as eucharistic, in which Jesus refers to himself as the Bread of Life, and speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, follows the great feeding. That feeding consisted not of bread and wine, but bread and fish. (John uses ὀψῆριον and not ἰχθῦς i.e. cooked fish, fish ready to be eaten, and more natural to a lad's picnic lunch, as are the "barley loaves", which are also directly reminiscent of the miracle of Elisha (2 Kings 4 : 42. That miracle was seen as a type of the messianic banquet, and may have accounted for the crowd wanting to make Jesus king. It also gives us another link with the eucharist). That, taken by itself, may not be significant. It may be pressing the detail too far to equate the blood of John 6 : 53-6 with the fish of the great feeding, but in early Christian iconography the fish does appear with bread in what are clearly representations of the Eucharist. (fig.iii p.36) It must also be said that the discourse in John 6 can be seen as concerning the bread, and the miracle at the wedding in Cana as John's teaching about the wine: the new covenant superceding the law as represented by the water of purification. Nevertheless it may be that the fish is introduced as a result of John's handling of the miraculous feeding,



Fig.iii. 3rd century; from the Cemetery of Callixtus. It appears to represent the great feeding, with its five loaves; but there is only one fish. The basket is similar to baskets present in several paintings of eucharistic scenes from the same period, in which fish are also depicted. A wine-cup appears to be incorporated into the basket.

together with the post-resurrection meals involving fish, which can easily be seen as foretastes of the messianic banquet, and thus closely linked with the eucharist; but that does not account for other uses of the fish symbol in the early Church.

There is, for example, the well-known passage from Tertullian's De Baptismo: "But we little fishes, according to our ICHTHYS Jesus Christ, are born in the water, nor are we saved any other way than by remaining in the water". Jesus is the fish (the word, significantly, is written by Tertullian in Greek in a Latin treatise, and with a possible reference to the familiar acrostic), but Christians are referred to as little fishes. This can scarcely arise from references to the fishes in the great feedings, but it might from the miraculous draught of fish in John 21, where the fishes seem to refer to the

future converts brought in by the "fishers of men". John's setting is once more a meal, but the understanding of fish in terms of converts is confused when Jesus suggests that some be eaten. It may be that John has combined two stories, a possibility suggested by C.K.Barrett.(31) On the other hand, John's use of the word ἰχθῦς for the fish caught, and ὁ ψάριον for the fish to be eaten could indicate both his awareness of the dilemma and his resolution of it. Tertullian's use of the fish image is echoed in a 3rd-century epitaph from Autun:

Divine offspring of the heavenly Fish, preserve a reverent heart when thou takest the drink of immortality that is given among mortals.... Take the honey-sweet food of the Saviour of saints and eat it with hunger, holding the Fish in your hands.(32)

The eucharistic implication of "Take the honey-sweet food of the Saviour of saints... holding the Fish in thy hands" is also present in the early 3rd-century epitaph that Bishop Abercius of Hierapolis composed for himself:

Everywhere faith led the way and set before me for food the Fish from the Spring mighty and pure, whom a spotless Virgin caught, and gave this to his friends to eat, always having sweet wine and giving the mixed cup with bread.(33)

The fish symbolism, so common in the early Church and closely linked with eucharist and baptism, thus presents a confused image. It appears to be able to represent Christ, the individual christian, and an essential constituent of the messianic banquet. These confusions could be accounted for if the fish were a symbol originally taken over from Jewish sources, but which was found to be not entirely satisfactory, and eventually dropped out of usage as it proved difficult to assimilate. The rationalisation implicate in the acrostic which makes the initials of ICHTHUS represent 'Jesus Christ Son of God and Saviour', points in that direction, making the fish not a symbol, but a sign, rather as three steps to the chancel can be made to stand for the Persons of the Trinity.

However, there were important associations with the fish both in Judaism and in the ancient Near East generally, which spoke to the first Christians and possibly to some of their gentile converts. In Egypt it was a symbol of immortality, representing in legend the phallus of Osiris; in Mesopotamia it represented life, and was the food of funerary banquets; in ancient (though not in classical) Greece it was a symbol of immortal hope. Such association could have developed from its shape and from the fact that, living in water, it was able to survive in the very element which represented both life and death. It is not surprising, then, that fish appear on amulets found in Jewish graves; it may also account for the fact that in some pictures of Moses striking water from the rock, fish appear in the resultant pools, as for example in a picture from Dura, where they could be seen as symbols of life, if not of immortality. It is interesting to note that in an early fourth-century mosaic in the mausoleum of Constantia in Rome, Jesus is depicted giving the law. He is flanked by two figures, one of which may be John the Baptist, and the other seems to be Moses, holding his rod, and is standing in or on water in which there appear to be fish.(fig.iv.p.39)

There are traces of a more specific symbolic value attached to the fish. In a parable attributed to Rabbi Akiba (early 2nd-century A.D.) the faithful are described as little fishes: that as fishes cannot exist outside water, so the faithful will die if they neglect the Torah. A little earlier, Rabbi Gamaliel, known to Christian readers from the Acts of the Apostles, described the qualities of various kinds of students of the Torah in terms of different sorts of fish. Could such writing have been the original inspiration of Tertullian's illustration?

As well as standing for the faithful, the fish in Judaism has messianic associations which arise from references to the great



Fig.iv. 4th-Century mosaic from the mausoleum of Constantia. The presence of fish, suggesting the faithful, is reinforced by the presence of sheep. This makes it possible to think of the figure on the left as Peter, the feeder of Christ's sheep in the new Israel. The presence of shelters behind the two figures, however, suggests the Transfiguration, making the figure on the left Elijah. The scroll and the rod (see text) seems to confirm the right hand figure as Moses. But, as with many pictures, there are a variety of possible identifications and therefore of interpretations, which only serves to enhance their significance.

sea-monster, Leviathan. In Job chapter 41 he is described at length, and used as an instance of God's power as compared with Job's insignificance. In Isaiah chapter 27 we read that "... the Lord with his hand and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan .. and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea". That will be done "in that day ..." a phrase which is a common eschatological reference. Jewish tradition built on this material, so that in the messianic age God will kill Leviathan and give his flesh to the faithful to eat. So fish is to be the main constituent of the messianic banquet, at least in some forms of Jewish expectation. Possibly related to that is

the Jewish Sabbath evening meal, the *Cena Pura*, of which fish was a significant constituent, together with bread and wine. E.R. Goodenough suggests that

If the Jewish messianic fish whose flesh all were to eat was a current conception and was pre-figured in the Friday night fish meal, it is not surprising that Christians should have identified Jesus with that fish, nor is it surprising that after they had indicated this identification by the famous acrostic, they soon forgot the fish's Jewish origin.(34)

Although the widespread acceptance of such ideas in Jewish circles in the 1st century A.D. is by no means certain, it would go some way towards explaining the otherwise rather strange use of the fish in relation to the Christian eucharist.

The Cup. As well as being physically necessary to contain the wine, the cup also carried symbolic associations. It shares the equivocal nature of the wine. It is used in a good sense to represent God's blessing (Ps 23 : 5 "... my cup runneth over ..."); but also in a bad sense (Jer 25 : 25 : "The Lord, the God of Israel said to me: 'Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I shall send you drink it'."). The latter sense is dominant in the New Testament. When James and John ask for privileged positions, Jesus asks them: "Are you able to drink the cup that I shall drink?" (Matt 20 : 22) In Gethsemane Jesus asks that "this cup" may pass from him (Matt 26 : 39 cf. also John 18: 11).

Thus in taking the cup at the eucharist both the reality of present and potential sufferings, and the promise of God's blessing were present.

The Meal. None of the symbols of bread, wine, vine and cup could be seen in isolation. They came together in the context of a meal, and that in itself, was full of symbolic significance.

There was, first of all, the matter of relationship and mutual acceptance. To share a meal with others was to be prepared to be associated with them and they with you, and implied a bond of loyalty

and intimacy. This was at the root of the problems about table-fellowship with Gentiles. So to share the eucharistic meal would imply accepting Christ, the host at the table, and being accepted by him; and accepting and being accepted by the others at the meal. Attendance could therefore not be casual, hence Paul's anger at the Corinthians' abuses, and his assertion: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread". (1 Cor 10 : 17)

But the eucharist was no ordinary meal. The fact that in the Gospel of John the Last Supper appears to have been held a day earlier than suggested in the synoptic gospels has led to scholarly debate both about its timing and its Passover character. However, on whatever night the Last Supper took place, it was interpreted from the beginning in Passover terms, and was seen as the equivalent celebration of the deliverance that God had brought about through Christ: "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast." (1 Cor 5 : 7) There is a possibility that the Last Supper may have been the Seder meal, a special home ceremony on the first night of Passover, to inform the children of the deliverance from Egypt (ref. Ex 13 : 8). In the Seder one of the three loaves was broken in two, half eaten at once, and the other half eaten at the end of the meal as a reminder of the paschal lamb. One is reminded of the word of Jesus over the bread: "This is my body..."

With these associations it was inevitable that the Eucharist spoke to the faithful of belonging to God, of being part of the redeemed Israel, and as Jesus was Messiah, of being part of the new Israel. There may, too, have been ideas of sharing in the life of God by sharing in the ritual eating of bread and drinking of wine. Such a concept was common in the Greco-Roman world and possibly also in Judaism. What is certain is that it was felt that divine gifts were

communicated by eating and drinking, and thus in sharing bread and wine with the disciples Jesus was giving them a share in the atoning power of his death.(35)

This links closely with the anticipation of the Messianic banquet. It had been part of Jewish expectations for several centuries. Reference has already been made to Isaiah 25, in which the prophet looks forward to the feast that "the Lord of Hosts will make for all people...". The picture is developed in the apocalyptic literature and in the writings of the Qumran sect, which has clear instructions about procedures to be adopted when the Messiah comes and calls the Council of the Community to his table.(36) There are several references in the Gospels, for example; "Men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God." (Luke 13 : 29, cf. also Luke 22 : 30 : Mt. 8 : 11) Many see the significance of the parables concerning banquets and wedding feasts in terms of the messianic banquet. Jesus' words in Mark of not drinking again of the fruit of the vine "... until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God" (ch. 14 : 25), and Paul's comment "... as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11 : 26) suggests that the primitive Church certainly saw the eucharist as, in part, an anticipation of the eschatological feast.

There is another element, inevitably present when a celebratory meal is shared by people who feel drawn together, and that is the spirit of thanksgiving. A meal is commonly an expression of a sense of occasion, hence the idea of a messianic banquet. The eucharistic meal, although it included confession of sins, was primarily a thankful celebration of God's saving act in Jesus Christ, which is why the meal itself came to be called the eucharist. The Didache gives instructions for thanks to be offered before the wine is drunk, and

before the bread is eaten, and that more thanks should be offered afterwards, adding the rider: "... allow prophets to give thanks as much as they will".(37) Justin Martyr (A.D.c150) describing the eucharist, says that the president "...offers up prayers and thanksgiving with all his might". He goes on to say that the eucharist is celebrated on the "...day of the sun, because it is the first day, on which God put to flight darkness and chaos and made the world, and on the same day Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead". (38).

So the themes of anamnesis, new covenant, fellowship, foretaste of the messianic banquet, and thanksgiving, that we find in the New Testament understanding of the eucharist, all find symbolic expression in the visual components of bread, wine, cup and meal, and the implied allusion of the vine and vineyard. Those elements, together with the water of baptism, were inevitably part of Christian worship from the beginning.

We have looked very briefly at an outline of the symbolism inherent within them for the primitive Church. How much of all this wealth of symbolic association was consciously experienced by the early Christians we shall never know; neither can we be certain what gestures were used to emphasise or draw attention to the significance of any particular elements. The gestures and movements of celebrants and worshippers however form part of the visual imagery that must be taken into account wherever possible. We can be certain, however, that the bread, the wine, the cup and the meal were not seen simply as physical and utilitarian elements. Jesus' words: "This is my body", and "This is my blood of the new covenant" indicate that. Even without those sayings, the elements themselves would have said much to the participants, perhaps different things to different people in varying circumstances. With the background that was inherited and that which was built up by constant repetition within the Church, the bread was

not ordinary bread, the wine was not ordinary wine, and the gathering was not an ordinary meal. Everything pointed beyond itself to another reality.

In a sense those elements were non-controversial. None argued that water should not be present when someone was baptised. The same holds true for the bread, wine etc. of the eucharist. Later on, when visual material such as sculpture and painting was produced and began to play a part in liturgy and devotion, debate and argument ensued. So we move on to look at those developments.

Chapter 3. FROM CATACOMB PAINTING TO ICON: ART CONSCIOUSLY PRODUCED

Material produced before the Peace of the Church and still surviving today is limited. It comes mainly from the catacombs of Rome, and the Christian remains at Dura Europus. The Christian buildings at Dura were completed about 240, captured by the Persians in 256, and abandoned completely thereafter. Paintings from there can be fairly securely dated. However, it is much more difficult to be precise in the dating of catacomb material and sarcophagal reliefs, and that does not make it easy to trace lines of development except in very broad terms.

There are features of the material which are at first sight surprising: for instance the very common allusions to Jonah, or the way pagan forms are used to stand for Christian characters. There are other elements surprisingly missing, for example there are scarcely any references to the Passion of Christ, and few, if any, examples of the cross. (An exception is a badly damaged painting of Christ crowned with thorns and struck by a soldier, found in the catacomb of Praetextatus.) It may be that the artists were under certain constraints, such as the need for discretion where persecution was a threat. This could account for the apparently pagan or Jewish themes, which Christians could easily interpret in their own terms, but which casual observers would take on their face-value. Motifs such as the teaching philosopher, or Hermes carrying the ram, or the vintage scenes, would also provide pagan converts with familiar figures and symbols easily adapted to express Christian themes. Furthermore, showing how the Old Testament had foreshadowed the New was a vital reassurance for the Jewish catechumen; and for the Gentile it established that the new religion had a distinguished pedigree. It has also been suggested(39) that before the Peace of the Church great emphasis was placed on the symbolic and mystical meaning of Christ's

life, which could be apprehended more immediately through his person as foretold in the Old Testament, which may account for the dearth of Passion references. Perhaps the need for discretion and the tradition of mystical interpretation were both influential in the choice of the scenes depicted.

Old Testament themes. The main material from the Old Testament comprises the Fall, Noah and the Flood, the sacrifice of Isaac, Moses striking water from the rock, the story of Jonah, and the following stories associated with Daniel: the three men in the furnace, Daniel in the lion's den, and Daniel and Susanna. With the exception of the Fall, they are all to do with deliverance: Noah from the waters of death caused by the sin of man; Isaac saved by the divine substitution of a ram; the people of Israel saved from dying of thirst in the wilderness by the miraculous provision of water; Jonah saved by the divine provision of the great fish; and in the Daniel-stories people are saved from the death which is threatened by persecution and false accusation. The Fall represents the origin of sin which is the root cause of the condition from which men need to be delivered, and provides an obvious starting point.

The Fall. In perhaps its oldest depiction, a badly-deteriorated picture from the Baptistery at Dura Europus, Adam and Eve (in the bottom left-hand corner) face the viewer, with the Good Shepherd standing above them. His position and his much larger proportions indicate his importance, and his presence could symbolise the redemption that is to come. The picture might possibly be seen as a highly compressed representation of the whole Gospel. (Fig.v. p.47)

There is a much clearer and better preserved picture in the Cemetery of SS Peter and Marcellinus in Rome, which Du Bourguet dates as late 3rd century. The couple stand, eyes lowered, aware of their nakedness, with the tree and the serpent between them. The picture has a simple

quality about it, in which the overriding impression is downcast shame. Their pose is submissive, with lowered shoulders and hands together as if bound. It suggests the captivity to sin from which Christ is to deliver man. (Fig.vi. p.48)



Fig.v. Early 3rd century; from the Baptistery at Dura Europus.

Noah and the Flood. A strange and common feature in the depictions of Noah, both in picture and relief, is that he is floating in a small chest, without his family and the animals, though often the dove is present (see fig.vii.p.49 & fig.viii.p.49). It is a far cry from the great ark described in Genesis. Several reasons have been put forward to explain it. Henry Chadwick (40) detects a Jewish precedent behind the design. He refers to the Phrygian town of Apamea, with a Jewish population which believed Noah's Ark had run aground on a hill near the town, and that remains of it still survived. Late in the second century A.D. coins were minted in Apamea portraying Noah and his Ark.

The type so very closely resembles the manner in which Noah is portrayed in Christian catacomb art that it is difficult to deny a connexion. Probably, therefore, other Old Testament scenes

in early Christian art were taken from Jewish models.



Fig.vi. 3rd century; from the Cemetery of SS Peter and Marcellinus

Michael Gough (41) however, suggests that the stylistic reduction shows the tendency towards compression " ... that seems innate in the first Christian art, probably because elaboration would have been thought meretricious or distracting." Against that one has to weigh the great detail on many reliefs. Gilbert Cope (42) explains the reduction of the Ark in the following way:

The Ark is usually represented as a tomb-like or coffin-like box from which Noah is emerging in a "resurrection attitude"; the general effect is very suggestive of both Greek and Egyptian myths in which death is likened to a journey by boat



* Fig.vii. 3rd century from the Cemetery of SS Peter & Marcellinus. Noah is just emerging from the ark, which has been reduced by the artist to a box (see text).

Fig.viii. Detail from a 3rd century Sarcophagus. (For complete panel see p.53 fig.xi.) As with the previous illustration, the ark is reduced to a box. Unlike that picture, the bird carries a branch. It is the dove with the olive branch, the sign that salvation has come. Both examples, and there are many like them, suggest a rising from the grave.



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to the next world, and, as such, would readily have been accepted by converted pagans. Noah's wife and family and the animals appear to have been lost in transit - the point is that the emphasis is on personal salvation in the context of burial, rather than on the corporate salvation which is more generally symbolized by the Ark.

This can be seen, therefore, as an example of the presentation of a symbol which pagan converts could enter into.

Whether or not Chadwick or Gough or Cope is correct, the important thing to consider is what the design evoked in the mind of the Christians who saw it. Even if second-century Jews saw Noah in terms of individual salvation, the presence of the dove makes possible a specifically Christian connotation, with the allusion of Christ's baptism of every Christian, in which the Spirit is given, and salvation assured.

The sacrifice of Isaac. There are two themes brought together for Christians in this incident. Perhaps the primary one is the salvation of Isaac by the provision of an alternative sacrifice. For Christians the sacrifice through which men and women are saved is Christ, and that may have been immediately suggested to them. The secondary theme is the faith of Abraham. In Romans chapter 4, and Galatians chapter 3, Paul puts great emphasis on Abraham's faith as the prototype of Christian faith. In Hebrews chapter 11, Abraham is celebrated as one of the heroes of faith, with specific reference to the sacrifice of Isaac in verse 17. So the themes of salvation and faith are held together in a single image; and we note, as with the picture of the Fall at Dura, and the depictions of Noah, enormous compression. It is compression not so much of artistic detail as of theological content; there is so much for the faithful to feed on which nevertheless remains cryptic to the uninitiated. (Fig.ix.p.51).

Moses striking water from the rock. Theological compression is discernible here too. One expects pictures of Moses leading the

people through the Red Sea, or giving the Law on Sinai, but this seems an odd incident to single out, except that St. Paul made particular reference to it. Speaking of the people of Israel with Moses, he wrote:

... all ate the same supernatural food, and all drank the same supernatural drink. They drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

(1 Cor. 10 : 3,4)

The water in the Noah pictures is the water of death, the water here is the water that brings life. Sometimes Moses is pictured alone, at other times with others, perhaps representing both the elders



Fig.ix. 3rd Century from the Cemetery of Priscilla. Abraham, eyes raised to heaven in a gesture of faithful obedience, points to the thicket, the place of sacrifice which also becomes the place of redemption, while Isaac, in his innocence carried the kindling in much the same attitude as Jesus carrying his cross.

mentioned in Exodus 17, and, for those with eyes to see, Christian converts. (Fig.x.p.52). Reference has already been made (43) to

the picture at Dura which shows fish in the pools formed by the cascading water. So the incident shows the prerequisites of salvation: Christ, and the waters of baptism; with the additional hint of the living water of Christ's promise in John 4 : 10.



Fig.x. 4th Century; from the Cemetery of Callixtus.

This is an example of Moses with the accompanying elders, one of whom is drinking. As with very many early paintings, the figures are in contemporary costume and without beards. So the uninitiated have a double barrier to penetrate: from an apparently Roman scene, to the Jewish, to the Christian interpretation. That interpretation would include seeing Jesus as the new Moses, inaugurating the new Israel, as well as the reference to the waters of Baptism and Jesus as the provider of living water.

Jonah. The story of Jonah is frequently portrayed in an almost comic strip form. He is shown being thrown from the ship, swallowed by the fish, and resting safely under the gourd. Although the Biblical Jonah is a parable about mission, the story is treated as a way of speaking about salvation. Jonah's disobedience leading to his being thrown into the sea is the equivalent of Adam's sin leading to his being subjected to death. As God did not leave Jonah to die, but intervened to save him through the fish, so God saves the children

of Adam through his divine intervention in Christ. Jonah is brought safely to land, and is shown under the sheltering gourd, perhaps the symbol of paradise. It may be significant that the fish is shown as a sea-serpent, and we have already noted (44) the place of the sea-monster Leviathan in one strand of Jewish Messianic expectation. The importance of the Jonah story is reinforced by Christ's reference to Jonah as a type of the resurrection, and as a sign of Christ's divine authority (cf. Matthew 12 : 39,40; 16 : 4).



Fig.xi. 3rd Century sarcophagus. (see detail, fig.viii.p.49)
The dominant motif in this panel is the story of Jonah. He is shown passing from the ship to the jaws of the serpent-like fish, being released on to the shore, and resting beneath the gourd. The ship's yard-arm and rigging suggest the shape of the cross, though that may not have been intentional. The ark is set almost within the coils of the great fish, linking Noah and Jonah as two who were saved from the waters of death by divine intervention. The primary reference to Jonah is provided by Jesus using Jonah's experience as a type of the resurrection. Other features include the good shepherd to the right of the panel, and Moses striking water from the rock, top centre.

Daniel. This series of stories clearly spoke to people faced with persecution and false accusation. Subjection to lions and to the flames was not unknown to Christians in the Roman Empire. There is no New Testament reference to Daniel, the three in the furnace, or Susanna. They stand on their own as an encouragement and a reassurance of the ultimate victory of God over the forces of evil.



Fig.xii. 3rd Century from the Cemetery of Priscilla. In this picture of the three men in the furnace the dove is depicted. It is a clear reference to the Holy Spirit, and may stand for the angel in the original story (Daniel Ch. 3). The fact that the dove is carrying a branch in its beak also suggests the story of Noah and its theme of God's power to save from death.

New Testament themes. By their very nature the Old Testament scenes, with the possible exception of Daniel, are allusive. They do not seem to have been chosen for their own sake, but because they were easily capable of Christian re-interpretation. The New Testament scenes are not quite so easy to analyse. They are all to some degree narrative, although as has already been noted, the most important incidents of the death and resurrection of Jesus are missing. There are pictures of a young woman with an infant, who may have been Mary and Jesus, and epiphany scenes. There are pictures of baptism, both the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of converts; and of the Last Supper. Some miracles are illustrated,



Fig.xiii. 3rd to 4th Century; from the Cemetery of SS Peter and Marcellinus.

The three complete panels visible bring together three major Old Testament motifs that frequently recur: the sacrifice of Isaac, Daniel safe among the lions, and Jonah safely under the gourd. If the animal in the bottom picture is the ram all three depict the theme of salvation. Daniel's pose may indicate perfect freedom, it is also in what one might call a semi-orans position: however, Christians could hardly see it without seeing also the crucifixion.

including Christ walking on the water, raising Lazarus, and healing the woman with the issue of blood. There are pictures of a man carrying a bed, who may have been the paralytic of Mark 2 : 11 or the man from the Pool of Bethzatha of John 5 : 8. There are also pictures of Jesus with the woman at the well.



Fig.xiv. 3rd Century from the Cemetery of Callixtus.

This is described by du Bourguetas the "Baptism of Christ beside a Fisherman". The smallness of the central figure may be thought to tell against that, and it could depict the baptism of a new convert, described by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel as one of his "little ones - τῶν μικρῶν" (Matthew 18 : 6).

The baptism and eucharist pictures would evoke the associations already described in the previous section, and to these could be added the walking on the water and the meeting of Jesus with the woman of Samaria, as they carry the common element of water, which has also been examined earlier. The healing miracles might speak of the power of Jesus to free people from the paralysing and isolating effects of sin. The raising of Lazarus would have spoken powerfully of Christ's power over life and death. That element may have been uppermost in the minds of the faithful very often, as the setting of the catacomb paintings were funeral.

From pagan sources, portrayals of the seasons would speak of the sequence of birth, growth, decay and death, followed by new life;



Fig.xv. 3rd Century; from the Baptistry at Dura Europus. In this badly deteriorated picture Peter stands bottom right, holding the hand of Jesus, most of whose body has been lost as the plaster has cracked and fallen away. Three disciples are seen watching from the boat.

and the familiar "orans" figures easily become praying Christians.

The only general depictions of Jesus from this period before the Peace of the Church, appear to be of him teaching, or as the Good Shepherd. These, too, pick up pagan models, for Jesus is shown as a figure like Orpheus, or as a teaching philosopher. (Fig.xvi.p.58) One early sarcophagus has a vintage scene next to what looks like a figure of Hermes carrying a ram; but the Christian would have seen allusions to the Good Shepherd and Jesus as the True Vine, with

overtones of the Eucharist and the messianic banquet. (Fig.xvii.p.59)

One striking exception to the unobtrusive handling of the figure of Christ is the "Christos Helios" mosaic, usually dated in the mid 3rd. Century, in the Tomb of the Julii under St. Peter's in Rome. Aurelian (270-75) had introduced solar-pantheism as the official religion of the state, but in a daring gesture Christ is pictured in the sun-chariot, taking the sun-god's place. (Fig.xviii.p.60).



Fig.xvi. 3rd Century; from the Cemetery of Domitilla. In this picture the two figures of Orpheus and Hermes are combined, with the figure carrying pipes at his waist, and a sheep across his shoulders.

Symbolic devices. To these pictures must be added the symbolic devices of : Alpha and Omega, and the chi-ro, which were cryptic allusion to Christ; the fish; the anchor, sometimes shown with fish, which spoke of stability and security, and carried a cross-design on



Fig.xvii. A late 3rd. Century sarcophagus.

The three figures of Hermes (The Good Shepherd), the "orans" figure in the centre, and the Philosopher (Christ teaching) to the right provide a framework for biblical motifs. The right hand section includes Adam and Eve, Noah and the eucharist; the left hand side includes the three-part story of Jonah, and Daniel among the lions.

its shaft; the dove, representing the Holy Spirit; the peacock, whose flesh was alleged never to putrify, thus making it a symbol of immortality; and the palms, perhaps both a reference to Palm Sunday, and suggestive of the victory wreath of those who had run the race and completed the course (cf. Hebrew 12 : 1; 2 Tim. 2 : 5).

So the material consciously and carefully produced by the early Christians was varied in content and style, within certain limits. But why was it produced at all? The wall paintings of Altamira may have had a pragmatic function of ensuring an abundance of game and a successful hunt by means of sympathetic magic. It is difficult to attribute similar motives to the Christian artists. The liturgical notion of ex opere operato had yet to be evolved. One cannot



Fig.xviii. 3rd Century ceiling mosaic from the Mausoleum of the Julii.

The figure in the chariot is unmistakably the exalted Christ with the nimbus, and outline of a cross behind him.

discount a natural urge to put into visual form the things that mean most to one, as poets write poetry, within of course the constraints of the time. That may account for some of the material, but it does not answer the question of why the bulk of the work was produced.

Why was it produced? It has been said that there was a great suspicion of any form of pictorial art in Judaism, and subsequently in early Christianity, and that it was based on the second

commandment. If this were true it would imply that early Christian art was produced by the ignorant or the subversive. However, the discovery over a wide-spread area of synagogue murals has challenged that assumption, perhaps indicating that the strict interpretation of the prohibition was limited to rabbinic Judaism, and therefore making it less likely that the first Christians rigorously applied it. It is true that disquiet about visual images developed, but it did not assume the proportions of major controversy until later.

At the other extreme it has been suggested that the first Christian artists were directed in their work by theologians, and that doctrinal schemes were embodied in their pictures.(45) It is true that there are a limited number of themes treated, and both Eastern and Western sites share much in common. Given the distance between them (Rome to Dura Europus is over 1700 miles as the crow flies) the similarities of treatment is remarkable. However, without more concrete evidence of organised theological direction, one can do no more than note the theory.

In any case, certainty about the precise significance of some of the material, or even of its subject matter, is notoriously difficult to arrive at. Mention has already been made of the picture of the man carrying a bed: was he the paralytic or the man from the pool-side? To take one other example, there is a picture in the Catacomb of Priscilla, of a mother and child.(Fig.xix.p.62). Above her head is a dark red spot with two less well-defined ones a little lower; and there is an ochre-coloured mark above and between the woman and another figure to the right of the picture. That figure is looking at the woman, and its left hand appears to be pointing towards one of the marks. Du Bourguet (46) says simply that it is Balaam pointing out the star to Mary. This is presumably on the basis of Numbers chapter 24, the Oracle of Balaam:

I see him, but not now;
 I behold him, but not nigh:
 a star shall come forth out of Jacob,
 and a scepter shall rise out of Israel ... (v.17a)



Fig.xix. Late 2nd. Century. Cemetery of Priscilla.

Gough (47) speaking of the same picture, says that the figure is usually identified with Isaiah, and the picture commonly called The Prophecy of Isaiah. One assumes that this arises out of Isaiah chapter 9:

The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light ...
 For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given. (vv 2a & 6a)

Either identification could be right. Indeed, the figure on the right could be Joseph, or even one of the magi.

One is tempted to favour the simplest answer and to see such pictures whenever one can as simple narratives. Thus one obvious reason for their presence may be as aids to teaching. Jocelyn Toynbee (48) suggests that there was one school of thought in the early Church which:

...was convinced of its value for expressing the creed of the faithful in visual language, and for instructing them through the eye in its tenets. To this school of thought the raison d'être of religious art was to be the medium of a sacred message. The figure or scene is never an end in itself: it always points to something beyond itself.

If that is correct it means that they were more than teaching aids, for they seem to have been intended to help the faithful to enter into the scene and identify themselves with the reality symbolised in the pictures, perhaps by identifying themselves with one of the characters represented. As Michael Gough (44) says of the Eastern school of Christian art:

... the artistic instinct was apparently to make an immediate psychological impact, and to reject the sort of naturalism that might have dimmed or obscured it.

Yet the very nature of the material, or rather the nature of the reality it symbolised, demanded a response from the believer: it could be of praise, or penitence, or thanksgiving, or dedication. It is easy to see how they could become aids to contemplation and means through which the worshipping Christian could feel confronted by some aspect of God. Therefore, although the original reasons for the Christians painting and carving may have included the natural creative urges plus the need for visual material to teach and encourage the faithful, once the material was there it exerted its

own influence which its creators may not have foreseen.

A new element came into the character of the art, which seems to have coincided with the Peace of the Church at the beginning of the fourth century, and the greater openness that now became possible. Clear unambiguous portraits of Christ and the saints begin to appear, alongside the narrative material. Christ is presented in himself, for his own sake, perhaps to focus prayer or to evoke a response. Figures of those in whom the Church discerned most clearly the image of God: Mary, the Apostles, the saints and the martyrs, now face us directly, with their eyes searching us out. The ikon has been born.



Fig.xx. 4th Century. Cemetery of Commodilla.

It did not supplant the other visual images and symbols in the liturgy and devotion of the Church. The water, bread, wine, cup and meal of baptism and eucharist remained. Much of their symbolic associations were re-expressed in the narrative art and symbolic devices. The new development, however, in which the central figure in itself confronts the viewer, assumed a prominent place in the devotional life of the Church. This raised fundamental theological questions, and provoked serious and sometimes bitter disputation. It centred upon what has come to be called "the Theology of the Image", and to its development we now turn.

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Chapter 4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ICON :
AN ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN THE ICONIC EXPERIENCE

The implication of the previous section is that the icon was not a product of conscious intention, but that at some point a painting was produced that made its own impact. It made the viewer stop short as he found himself addressed by God through the picture. The present writer became aware of a similar process some years ago when a lady was showing him a portrait she had painted of her father shortly before he died. He had been a devout Christian and a good man, and had meant much to her. She said: "That picture is for me an icon. Every time I see it it makes me want to say my prayers". It had not been deliberately painted for that purpose, but once complete, it produced its own effect. Perhaps for that reason the icon may be seen as one of God's gifts to the Church, rather than as one of man's achievements; and also the reason why icon painters remained anonymous for the first thousand years and more.

Definitions are always inadequate, but in minimal terms one can describe an icon as a visible image of Christ or the saints, sometimes as a portrait, sometimes in a narrative context, which came to be seen by many in the early Church as effective media through which man's devotion and prayer could be offered to God, and God's grace be conveyed to man.

It may be true to say that it began with an experience, that the icon "happened" to people, that it "worked"; and that the difficulties began when they tried to explain, or describe, or analyse that experience. In a similar way one could say that the disciples felt, through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and whatever it was that happened at Pentecost, a deepened and renewed relationship with God. Somehow old barriers seemed destroyed, and they experienced reconciliation and a new freedom. When they tried to express what they felt in words, they used models from the law courts, or from

the sacrificial system, and they had also to find ways of describing Jesus which did justice to their experience of his humanity, and to their experience of God being uniquely present in his presence. It was the ensuing theology, or theological formulations, rather than the primary experiences, about which arguments developed.

The descriptions or explanations had to be such as to make it clear that what they described was consistent with other experiences of God that the Church deemed valid. (This may suggest a far more tightly organised and regulated Church life than would have been true for the first century or so, but the principle holds true). Unfortunately it often happens that when the experiential emphasis is replaced by the credal, the formula of words or the particular model becomes sacrosanct, and the primary experience lost sight of. The doctrine of the divinity of Christ had to be hammered out in the context of the monotheism of "Hear O Israel, the Lord the God, the Lord is one ..." The profound and formative experience of God in Jesus Christ meant that a new understanding of God as the Trinity eventually burst through the constraints of the old formulae.

The theology of the iconic experience had to face the challenge of certain views of the nature of the divinity of Christ, and also of the second Commandment:

You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them... (Exodus 20 : 4-5)

The defenders of the icons had to establish that the prohibition was not binding on Christians, that the essence of the commandment concerned the worship of images as idols, and that icons were gateways to God and gateways from God. They also had to make it clear that icons were not thought of as being in any way divine in themselves, and that they did not misrepresent the true nature of the incarnation.

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Contextual influences: the holy man and the cult of relics.

Before arguments could ensue, and defenses have to be made, the practice of using icons in worship and devotional life had to develop. Everything develops within a context, and elements within that context influence and affect that development, building on or reinforcing the involuntary response that some pictures evoked. Among the contemporary influences that bore upon the way icons were used and thought about were the place of the holy man or saint, and the cult of relics.

Wherever one tries to pick up the roots of the cult of the saints, the theme of joining heaven and earth, or the divine and the human, is present. A primary and ancient Old Testament metaphor is that of man created in the image of God. It presumes that there is something deeply in common between God and man, and while there is no individual who adequately expresses that image, humanity is at least potentially able to express it. There is, moreover, a persistent assumption that is man's duty to reflect divine qualities: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy". Much of the so-called Priestly Code can be understood as teaching about how Israel may more fully reflect God's holiness. The prophetic teaching can be seen in similar light. The great offence is that Israel has not shown in its life the faithfulness and righteousness of God.

In some respects the Old Testament prophet is the prototype of the holy man or saint of the early Christian era. His important, or perhaps one could say, defining characteristic, was not confined to his words or prophetic actions, but was seen in the whole form of his life. Men like Hosea and Jeremiah seem to have lived out not just their own lives, but God's life too, and their conflicting emotions are seen as reflecting God's conflicting desire to love and save his people, and also to fulfil the demands of his own justice and

righteousness. It can be seen clearly in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hosea, where God's love for his child, Israel, is movingly expressed, then his anger at Israel's faithlessness and the requirement of his justice that the nation be destroyed. This is followed instantly by the desire to save and restore: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim?... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender" (11 : 8). If the traditional view of Hosea's own experiences with his unfaithful wife Gomer is right, then it seems reasonable to suggest that the divine emotions he describes are the emotions he himself felt. The form of his life has been a vehicle of revelation, a meeting place of the human and divine.

Jeremiah, with his feeling of being chosen before he was born, of having to express the thoughts of God despite himself, illustrates the same principle:

He was made to be, in his own words, a visible 'fortified city' in the sight of the nation (Jer. 1 : 18). Agonised by an intense spiritual conflict, pleading for Israel yet accusing her too in her guilt, he found himself expressing to his contemporaries the divine pathos towards them. (50)

People also sensed the presence of God in those who performed remarkable actions or who possessed remarkable qualities. The Judges, and men like Saul and David and the Maccabees, were deemed to be possessed by God's spirit; not all the time, but when the inspired qualities were exhibited, for the spirit could certainly depart from them. However, it was felt that certain people were to a more or less permanent degree indwelt by divine power; as Nicodemus said to Jesus: "... no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." (John 3 : 2)

Reference to the charismatic figures might appear to present a parallel to the pagan cult of heroes. In some instances the exploits of the Judges, or of Saul, or of the Maccabees were similar to those of the Greek heroes. However, the uniquely significant thing about

the Christian saints, whether heroic martyr or ascetic hermit, was their ability to intercede with God for their fellow men. Such power came from their close intimacy with God. There was a joining of heaven and earth that was not externally impressive as Gideon's destroying the idol, or Judas' defeat of Antiochus might have been, but profoundly affected the relationship between the believer and God. The holy man could, through his prayers, "open the gates of heaven to the timorous believer". (51)

Some became saints through martyrdom, others by ascetic practice. The latter set themselves apart from society, without preventing people's access to them. This gave them a trustworthy objectivity, and the rigorous nature of their asceticism demonstrated their power over evil, and their closeness to God.

The holy man stands so still because he is pleading for men before the King of kings, in the consistorium of heaven. Men entrusted themselves to him because he was thought to have won his way to intimacy with God. (52)

Their attraction for the believer was that the suppliant could look at the face of their intercessor, and could feel himself in the physical presence of the holy. "The holy man was a clearly defined locus of the holy on earth". (53)

The martyr was by definition dead, and the holy man died eventually. Yet their powers of intercession were believed to continue and to be even more effective as they had gained closer intimacy with God. So there was a natural desire to continue to seek their intercession, and to be able to focus attention on a physical equivalent of the face of the holy man.

One equivalent was the relic. The relic carried with it the same atmosphere of the joining of heaven and earth as the saint's living presence had done. In fact the saint was still believed to be in a sense present at his tomb on earth: that is the place where his relics lay. Peter Brown cites an inscription on the tomb of St. Martin

at Tours:

Hic conditus est sanctae memoriae Martinus episcopus
Cuius anima in manu Dei est, sed hic totus est
Praesens manifestus omni gratia virtutum.

(Here lies Martin, of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of God; but he is fully here, present and made plain in miracles of every kind.) (54)

A little later he goes on to say:

In a relic the chilling anonymity of human remains could be thought of to be still heavy with the fulness of a beloved person. As Gregory of Nyssa said: 'Those who hold them embrace, as it were, the living body in full flower: they bring eye, mouth, ear, all the senses into play, and then, shedding tears of reverence and passion, they address to the martyr their prayers of intercession as though he were present'.(55)

This was believed to be true of every individual relic. Every fragment of a saint's body is "linked by a bond to the whole stretch of eternity"(56) The body of the saint could thus be scattered across the face of Europe. Relics, understood as the physical presence of the holy, were prized as a source of very great blessing and means of grace both by individuals and communities. They were sometimes received into their new resting places with rejoicing and ceremonial as befits royalty. They were guarded and fought over as the greatest of earthly possessions. The record of the treasures of the church of St. Servatius in Maastricht in the Netherlands, mentions the translation of relics of St. Peter and St. Marcellinus from Rome, "under a great concourse of people applauding the event". (57)

The icon as a secondary relic. As a bodily relic was equivalent to the living presence of the saint, so what might be called secondary relics came to be revered. Articles of clothing or personal effects belonging to the saint (relics ex contactu) were obvious candidates for such a process, and so were articles associated with pilgrimages to the location of the saint's life and miracles, and especially articles derived from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. So water from Galilee, olive wood from Gethsemane, a stone from the Mount of the

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Transfiguration, could assume the function of a relic. It has been suggested (58) that even the pictures of saints or New Testament events painted on the boxes containing such fragments became secondary relics. Similarly, golden keys to open the gate to the shrine of St. Peter were

treasured and potentially miraculous relics of the Roman pilgrimage, as were the little cloths, the brandea, which the pilgrims lowered on to the tomb below, drawing them up heavy with the blessing of Saint Peter. (59)

All this derived from the presence of the saint or holy man as a "locus of the holy on earth" and as a powerful intercessor.

... the core of the holy man's power in Late Antique society was the belief that he was there to act as an intercessor with God. Whether living or dead he was a favoured courtier in the distant empire of heaven: he had gained a 'boldness' to speak up successfully for his proteges before the throne of Christ.

If the Byzantines had not believed that it was possible for created beings to sway the will of God by their intercessions, then the rise of the holy man and the rise of the icon would not have happened. For the icon merely filled a gap left by the physical absence of the holy man, whether this was due to distance or to death. (60)

It is easy to say that "the icon merely filled a gap left by the physical absence of the holy man", but how did that happen? The relic, and to a lesser degree the secondary relic, derived its power by propinquity, a physical and tactile association with the saints. But at first sight the icon, as a picture painted by someone who themselves may never have seen the saint or witnessed his miracles, involves a break in the chain of continuity. Of course this may not have been so if the conventions governing the representation of particular saints derived from a living memory of their likeness, as is claimed by Ouspensky; (61) however, it would be very difficult to establish that in every case. But there was another way of looking at pictorial images which gave the icons their power, or one might say provided a readily-understood model to express the power that was felt. An icon could be considered a locus of the holy because

it depicted a holy person, and the way it could be considered to represent that person's presence was similar to the way portraits of the Emperor were held to represent the presence of the man himself.

An example of the way that worked out in practice could be taken from the riots in Antioch in 387. The unrest was occasioned by an Imperial Edict announcing a sharp increase in taxation. In the ensuing disturbances portraits of the Imperial family, painted on wooden panels in front of the law courts, were stoned and shattered, as were similar bronze statues. That turned the riot into a rebellion, because the portraits "partook of the sacred character which attached to the Imperial office ... and what was done to the effigy was considered as being done to his sacred person".(62) To stone the effigy was to stone the Emperor. The power of the Emperor was thought of as residing in his portrait, so that he was present, in the form of an image, in every part of the Empire.

That principle was later applied directly to icons and the argument was commonly repeated in the later controversies. In the picture there is both the $\epsilonἶδος$ (idea) and the $\muορφή$ (shape) of the Emperor. Whoever looks at the picture must recognise the Emperor in it, and whoever perceived the Emperor will recognise him as the person in the picture. "The picture can therefore say 'I and the Emperor are one'." (63) Worship offered to the image is offered to the Emperor.

It was natural for people who saw the Imperial images in this way to think of icons in a similar fashion. So icons came to be treated with the same respect as was shown to relics. When important icons were moved to a new site they were processed and welcomed. They were held to have miraculous powers and sometimes used as palladia, or protective banners, to be marched round threatened cities to protect them. Relics and images were often associated together.

Barnard(64) recounts the story of the commander of a Phrygian regiment who took the body of St. Menas from its grave in Phrygia to use it as a palladium during a military expedition to Libya. Finding it impossible to remove the body he commissioned a painting of the saint on a wooden panel, which he then placed on the remains of the saint, so that his blessing and power could be imparted to the painting. The image was taken wherever he went both as succour and weapon. Another development was that as the saints portrayed on the images were seen as gaurdian angels of those who were named with their name, icons could stand as god-parents at infant baptism.

Such practices were cleary open to abuse, despite the conventions of icon painting, including the labelling of the icons to indicate that they were representations of holy people and not in themselves to be worshipped as idols. It is scarcely surprising that controversy and debate should have arisen. It was in the course of the controversy that the theology of the image was established.

Chapter 5. THE ICONOCLASTIC CONTROVERSY:
ESTABLISHING THE THEOLOGY OF THE IMAGE.

Controversy surrounding the use of images flared up in the Eastern Empire in the eighth century. There were two distinct phases, the first beginning in the reign of the Emperor Leo III in 714 and ending when the Empress Irene brought the persecutions to a close in 780, thus paving the way for the 2nd Council of Nicaea in 786. The second phase began in 815 during the reign of the Emperor Leo V, and ended with the permanent vindication of the icons in the time of the Empress Theodora in 843.

The issues appear complex, but it is possible to discern four elements within them. The first was political, including reaction to the military threat of Islam, and establishing the position of the Emperor in relation to the Church. The second was theological, embracing such questions as: were the Old Testament prohibitions binding on Christians? was the existence and approval of images consistent with belief in the divinity of Christ? was the prohibition of images consistent with the doctrine of the incarnation? what was the nature of the veneration paid to the images? A third element was ecclesiastical, for there may have been a reaction of provincial, Oriental piety, over against the Greek piety of the capital.(65). One could add to that the rise of loci of the holy which competed with established loci approved by the hierarchy. One of the arguments used against the veneration of images, for example, was that there were no prayers for the consecration of images, as there were prayers for the consecration and ordination of priests, the dedication of churches, and the consecration of the Eucharistic bread. A fourth element was the undoubted abuse of the images in popular practice.

It is not easy to apportion degrees of weight to each factor, and it is clear that some arose by way of reaction to others. One fact

of the situation was the threat of Islam, another was the rapid increase and expansion in the use of images, and some consequent abuse. Those two facts together provide a convenient point of entry into the period.

Phase 1: 714-786: from Leo III to the Council of Niceae, and the arguments of John of Damascus.

Leo III came to the throne in 714. By that time the use of images was deep-seated and wide-spread, especially in the central and Western parts of the Eastern Empire. From the middle of the fifth century, probably as a result of the Christological controversies, the figure of Christ became more and more frequent, as a defence against heretical teaching. Ouspensky (66) suggests that it was particularly in response to the teaching of Arius that the letters 'alpha' and 'omega' were placed on either side of the image of Christ (cf. also fig.xx.p.64 above). This is confirmed by Canon 82 of the Quinisext Council of 692, which required that Christ should always be depicted in human form and not symbolically as the Lamb:

So that all may understand by means of it the depths of the humiliation of the Word of God, and that we may recall to our memory his conversation in the flesh, his passion and salutary death, and his redemption which was wrought for the whole world.(67)

With the proliferation of pictures of Christ, of Mary and of the saints, superstitious abuses and belief became apparent. Reference has already been made to the use of images as protective palladia (see above p.74). E.J.Martin (68) gives several other examples. There is the well-known story of the portrait of Jesus, which was allegedly sent by Jesus himself to Abgar, King of Edessa. John of Damascus develops the legend (almost a prototype of the later legend of Veronica) by saying that the painter commissioned by Abgar could not reproduce the brightness of Christ's face, so Jesus took his outer garment and pressed it to his face, leaving his image upon it.(69) A picture of Mary on the pillar of a church in Lydda was

believed to have been painted by unseen hands, and was able to perform miracles, as were countless other pictures according to popular acclaim. There are accounts of images being used to stand surety for loans, to bring water back to dried up wells, and as protective talismans against disaster.

All this served to disquieten some church leaders. Before Leo took action against the images two bishops, Constantine of Nacolia in Phrygia and Thomas of Claudiopolis on the Black Sea, expressed their fears that the use of images implied idolatry. In his letter to Thomas the Patriarch Germanus, while exhorting the veneration of images, admitted that there was considerable unrest in all parts of the Empire about them. Given the circumstances of the letter and its author, that is a very significant admission; Germanus was a staunch defender of the images, and was later deposed by Leo for his opposition to the iconoclastic measures. For him to admit to widespread unrest indicates the presence of an iconoclastic sentiment of some strength and duration.

Leo's own background, coming as he did from northern Syria, which was close to the anti-iconic semitic traditions of Judaism and Islam, pointed to the possibility of his being sympathetic to the views of men like Thomas and Constantine. So when he brought in his measures against the images he was expressing views already widely felt.

Such views were reinforced by the success of the Islamic forces. As Aidan Nichols (70) comments:

As city after city fell to the enemy, anxiety about the future was verbalized in the idea that the Byzantine state had drawn down God's wrath by its idolatry in permitting the veneration of the icons. The adoption of this framework did not only help people to take hold of their sense of malaise, it also enabled them to do something about it.

Further reinforcement came in the years immediately following Leo's public support for the iconoclast position when, in the summer of 726, volcanic disturbances in the Aegan caused widespread fear, and

seemed to confirm God's anger at continued toleration of image-worship.

Leo came to the throne at a moment when the Empire was in grave danger. Pressurised externally by enemies to East and West, it was racked internally by insurrections and anarchy (twelve Emperors in the seventy years before him), crude superstition and decadent morals (especially among the clergy), and the virtual cessation of learning. Leo was determined, in Martin's words, to "purify and raise the low tone of society".(71) This must have appeared essential to the Empire's survival and revitalization. Leo did not simply pick out the worship of images as a convenient scapegoat. There were many sins to be counteracted: homosexuality, blasphemy, tolerance of pagans. Such sins were punished, and in 722 Leo ordered the compulsory baptism of all Jews and Montanists. Such measures had been taken before, but this time they were seen to be insufficient. An attack had to be launched on one of the most ancient sins of mankind: idolatry; and there was clear Biblical precedent:

It was a presupposition which the Iconoclasts found writ large in the Bible. In the Old Testament, Israel had apostasized on many occasions; according to St. Paul the 'wrath of God's was 'poured out' over the human race for its idolatrous tendencies. Such a perspective stated nothing less than the truth. The Arab invasions had come to assume proportions of 'a great aboriginal catastrophe'; only national apostasy, and no amount of individual laxity, could explain them. The apostasy of Israel had always taken the form of a return to idols, and the slow decline of mankind into the mire of sin had taken the form of a steady increase in idolatry. Thus Iconoclasts could appeal to a fact which even the most elementary historical awareness could discover about their immediate past - there has been an apparent increase in the use and prominence accorded to images.(72)

So the first phase of the iconoclastic controversy centred upon idolatry and the violation of the second Commandment. As that was the root of the attack, it naturally determined the form of the defence.

Both sides agreed that Christians must not worship idols. The points at issue between them were whether or not icons were idols

and what was the nature of the worship that was offered.

The iconoclasts argued that images were idols, and that the worship offered to them was therefore blasphemous. It was a clear violation of the second Commandment. If further justification for the abolition of icons were needed one only had to look at the widespread superstitious abuses that were associated with them. It may be too simple to suggest that it seemed self-evidently right to Leo to move against the images, but it is a reasonable assumption. All the external pressures were there, with the military reverses and sub-marine eruptions already referred to pointing to God's displeasure. The depth and vigour of the opposition may have surprised Leo, and almost certainly spurred the iconoclasts into refining the theological justification for their actions. The central figure in that process was Leo's son, Constantine V.

The view that he inherited was that icons were idols. The second Commandment was unequivocal:

You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. (Exodus 20 : 4-6. cf. Dt. 5 : 8-9)

Icons were obviously images, and therefore to be prohibited.

Constantine developed the argument in two directions, one concerned with the nature of icons, and the other concerned the nature of the incarnation.

He claimed that an icon must be of the same nature as the person depicted, and that by very definition it was impossible to have an icon of Christ, because the nature of the so-called icon was physical wood and paint. The only genuine icon of Christ, he claimed, is the eucharist, which Christ created in the miracle of consecration:

"This is my body ... This is my blood". Christ chose bread

precisely because it has no human likeness, and thus he guarded against any possibility of idolatry. The orthodox said that, on the contrary, the holy gifts actually become the body and blood of Christ, and therefore cannot be an icon, because an icon is distinct from its prototype, and it is that distinction which makes it an image and not the reality.(73)

Constantine's major argument concerning the nature of the incarnation has as its foundation the doctrine that God is uncircumscribed - ἀπερίγραπτος - that he is not and cannot be limited by any boundaries. The argument can be simply stated: God is unlimited, and that which has no boundary cannot be depicted, for there can be no point at which God begins or ends, and no limit to the range of his presence in the universe. However, Christ is God, in him human and divine nature is indistinguishably and inseparably joined, therefore he shares God's uncircumscribable nature, and so cannot be depicted. It follows that any image of him must be false and blasphemous, either as limiting the illimitable or as suggesting a separation of the two natures.

In 753 Constantine summoned an Ecumenical Council in the palace of Hieria. It sat for seven months. Its opponents called it dishonest, and there are serious doubts about its ecumenical status: the Pope was not represented, and neither were the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. However, the duration of the Council indicates a degree of care and seriousness, and its influence was significant:

In fact this Council was evidently the greatest triumph the Iconoclastic party achieved in the whole history of the struggle. It never disappears from the discussion. The Council of Nicaea laboriously refutes every word of its Definition and the exegesis of its patristic citations. It is the greatest weapon of the Iconoclastic Revival under Leo the Armenian. (74)

Very little remains of the material produced by the Council save the "Horos" or Definition; but that gave authoritative support to

Constantine's views, and contained the heart of the iconoclasts'

case. Ouspensky (75) summarises part of the Definition as follows:

The name of Jesus is the name of the God-man. Therefore you commit a double blasphemy when you represent Him. First of all, you attempt to represent the unrepresentable divinity. Second, if you try to represent the divine and human natures of Christ on the icon, you risk confusing them, which is monophysitism. You answer that you only represent the visible and tangible flesh of Christ, only His human nature. But, in this case, you separate it from the divinity which is united with it, and this is Nestorianism. In fact, the flesh of Jesus Christ is the flesh of God the Word; it had been completely assumed and deified by him. How then do these godless persons dare to separate the divinity from the flesh of Christ, as the flesh of an ordinary man? The Church believes in Christ who inseparably and purely unites in Himself divinity and humanity. If you only represent the humanity of Christ, you separate His two natures, His divinity and His humanity, by giving this humanity its own existence, and independent life, seeing in it a separate person, and thus introducing a fourth person into the Holy Trinity.

Although the philosophical and theological case was put, the greatest weight was given to the appeal to the authority of Scripture, and the Fathers: such authority was essential in establishing a claim to orthodoxy. This is the area in which doubts have been cast on the genuineness of many of the quotations used at Hieria.

The evidence that the iconoclasts brought forward in support of their case came from Scripture, the Fathers and historical precedent and tradition. From the Scriptures the second Commandment was the obvious starting point, supplemented by texts like:

All worshippers of images are put to shame (Ps 97 : 7)

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth (John 4 : 24)

(They) exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles... they have exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever (Romans 1 : 23,25).

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view (κατὰ σάρκα - "according to the flesh"); even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer (2 Cor. 5 : 16).

The essence of the orthodox reply was that idolatry is only possible in paganism. Christ destroyed idolatry by revealing the

true nature of God, after which no Christian could ever worship an idol. The biblical quotations they used were intended to demonstrate two things: first that there was a legitimate use of material things that did not imply idolatry, for example the presence of carved or cast cherubim and bulls in Solomon's temple (2 Kings 6 : 25 & 29). The second purpose was to demonstrate that there are legitimate acts of reverence or veneration which are not the same as the worship properly and exclusively to be offered to God. Among the examples given were Abraham bowing - *προσκύνησις* - before the children of Heth (Genesis 47 : 7). It was therefore claimed that one can venerate an image without worshipping it as though it were God.

The patristic references are numerous, and both sides were guilty of quoting out of context, or with little discrimination, so that popular legend stands alongside passages from Basil or Gregory Nazianzen. Among the more weighty of the iconoclasts' authorities were Epiphanius (c315-413) and Eusebius (265-340). A direct quotation from Epiphanius is cited, forbidding the bringing of images into churches and the shrines of the saints, and is supported by the well-known incident of his tearing down a curtain of a church in a village in Palestine because it was painted with a picture. The quotation is generally regarded as spurious and was condemned as such by John of Damascus, who also claimed, regarding the incident with the curtain, that Epiphanius' own church was adorned with images. (76) e

The reference from Eusebius is from a letter to Augusta, wife of the Caesar, Gallus. She had asked permission to have an effigy of Christ. He refused her request, referring her to the second Commandment, adding:

Have you ever seen such a thing in a church or even heard of one? Have not such been banished throughout the world and driven out of our churches? (77)

He could have been challenged on the ground of exaggeration, but in

fact was shown to be an Arian, and his authority was therefore rejected.

A simple yet telling quotation came from Amphilochius of Iconium (c345-405):

It is not however our task to represent the physical form of the saints on slabs with paints, for we have no need of such, but to imitate their manner of life in the way of virtue.(78)

The answer to that at the orthodox Council of Nicaea was that the purpose of images was to show the saints as examples of virtue, and thus to inspire imitation. The point, however, was whether or not they were necessary. A better answer was to be found in the pamphlet Adversus Constantinum Caballinum in which the writer claimed that to convert the unbeliever it is better to take him inside a church and let his curiosity be roused by the pictures he sees, and the figure of Christ on the cross, rather than to tell him you worship the invisible. (79) The physical and visible is essential for leading unbelievers on towards the spiritual and invisible. John of Damascus made a similar point:

Shall we not then record with images the saving passion and miracles of Christ our God, so that when my son asks me, "What is this?" I may say that God the Word became man, and that through Him not only Israel passed through the Jordan, but the whole human race regained its original happiness? (80)

The iconoclasts claimed that images had no Dominical authority, and that there were no prayers to consecrate them. The answer to that was:

Just as the Gospel has been preached to the whole world, so also there has been an unwritten tradition throughout the world to make icons of Christ the Incarnate God, and of the saints, to bow down before the Cross and to pray facing East. (81)

It was also pointed out that there were no prescribed prayers for dedicating crosses, and no Dominical command to put anything in writing. The crosses and gospels are not rejected as lacking authoritative backing, and neither should icons, which have similarly been part of the Church's tradition.

John of Damascus was not present at any of the Councils. His arguments were expressed in his three Apologies Against those who attack the Divine Images. (82) They not only provide orthodox answers to specific points made by the iconoclasts, but also contain positive justification for the production and veneration of images. He was not alone in his views and others independently expressed particular points that he made as we have already seen. However, his appears to have been the most comprehensive approach, and his writings embrace the main orthodox position.

The opening paragraphs of the first Apology state the case (albeit in advance) against Constantine's view of the nature of the incarnation, that Jesus shared God's uncircumscribable nature and therefore cannot be depicted:

The flesh assumed by Him is made divine and endures after its assumption. Fleshly nature was not lost when it became part of the Godhead, but just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so also the flesh became Word, yet remained flesh, being united to the person of the Word. Therefore I boldly draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes by partaking of flesh and blood. I do not draw an image of the immortal Godhead, but I paint the image of God made visible in the flesh. (83)

The second Commandment, John argues, was given to Jews, to whom God was invisible, and therefore immeasurable and uncircumscribed. To attempt to draw what is limitless and invisible is both to attempt the impossible and to court idolatry. But we, the Christians, have

... received from God the ability to discern what may be represented and what is uncircumscribed....It is obvious that when you contemplate God becoming man, then you may depict Him clothed in human form. When the invisible One becomes visible to flesh, you may then draw His likeness. When He who is bodiless and without form, immeasurable in the boundlessness of His own nature takes the form of a servant in substance and in stature and is found in a body of flesh, then you may draw His image and show it to anyone willing to gaze upon it. (84)

He also made the point that if you insist on invoking the Jewish law at this point "... you might just as well insist on keeping the Sabbath and practising circumcision". (85)

8)

These thoughts led naturally to a discussion of the kind of worship or veneration that is proper to express in relation to an image. This develops what has already been alluded to (see above p.80). Proskunesis (veneration or respect) is to be clearly distinguished from latreia (worship) which is paid to God alone. Towards the end of the third Apology he gives a detailed analysis of the way worship (latreia) is offered to God. (86) First he outlines five categories of worship: service (douleia) as of a servant for his master; awe and yearning for God's glory; thanksgiving; petition for His blessing; and finally repentance and confession. All these are part of the worship due exclusively to God. However, there are ways in which this worship of God can be expressed through respect for people and seen in relation to God. The ways are listed in what appear to be an order of importance, and they include (in order) reverence for persons in whom God was most clearly present, such as Mary and the saints; reverence for those places and objects especially associated with Christ, such as Nazareth and the wood of the Cross; there is reverence for consecrated objects, such as the Gospel-book and the chalice; and there is included reverence for one another as made in God's image.

God is honoured through our veneration of those things which are only worthy of veneration because of their relation to God. Time and again John says that he does not worship matter or the created thing, but the Creator of matter. He applies this quite clearly to icons in the following passage:

If I honour and venerate the cross, the lance, the reed or the sponge, by which the murderers of God mocked and murdered my Lord, shall I not also bow before images made by believers with good intentions, who wish to glorify and keep in remembrance the sufferings of Christ? If I bow before the image of the cross, regardless of what kind of matter has been used to make it, shall I not venerate the image of the crucified one, who won our salvation on the cross? ... Obviously I do not worship matter; for if it should happen that a cross, which had been fashioned from matter, should be ruined, I would consign it to the fire, and the same with damaged images. (87)

There still remained the problem of the abuse of images, which could not be denied and was used as a reason for banning them. To this John replied, in two virtually identical passages in the first and second Apologies:

If you speak of pagan abuses, these abuses do not make our veneration of images loathsome. Blame the pagans, who made images into gods! Just because the pagans use them in a foul way, that is no reason to object to our pious practice. Sorcerers and magicians use incantations and the Church prays over catechumens; the former conjure up demons while the Church calls upon God to exorcise the demons. (88)

He seems to be saying that if you ban the veneration of images because of pagan abuse, you should also ban Christian exorcism because pagan magicians also practice it. He does not completely meet the point, because the real concern is not that pagans abuse images, but that Christians can be led away from true faith into pagan abuse. There is also the point that superstitious abuse can in effect teach the ignorant bad theology. So a better case is put in the pamphlet Adversus Constantinum Caballinum already referred to (see above p.83). The writer admits that images are abused by the ignorant, but pleads for better teaching rather than prohibition:

If an ignorant rustic greeted a courtier as the Emperor, would you send the rustic and the courtier both to the gallows? Would you not teach him better?

Perhaps the most positive statement John makes is in the second Apology, when he gives a summary of the intention and purpose of images:

But concerning this business of images, we must search for the truth, and the intention of those who make them. If it is really and truly for the glory of God and of His saints, to promote virtue, the avoidance of evil, and the salvation of souls, then accept them with due honour as images, remembrance, likeness and books for the illiterate. Embrace them with the eyes, the lips, the heart; bow before them; love them, for they are likenesses of God incarnate, of His mother, and of the communion of saints, who shared the sufferings and the glory of Christ, who conquered and overthrew the devil, his angels and their deceit.

In the following paragraph he adds:

The icon is a hymn of triumph, a manifestation, a memorial

inscribed for those who have fought and conquered, humbling the demons and putting them to flight. (89)

This was the position which was confirmed and restored by the Council of Nicaea in 786, which brought the first iconoclastic period to an end. Included in the Council's statement of faith was the following sentence:

The more frequently they are seen by means of pictorial representation, the more those who behold them are aroused to remember and desire the prototypes, and to give them greeting and the worship of honour. (90)

Phase 11:815-843: from Leo V to the Council of Constantinople and the arguments of Theodore of Studium

The second phase of the iconoclastic controversies began in the reign of Leo V, when military reverses once again suggested divine judgement on idolatry. The main protagonists in this period were the iconoclast scholar John Grammaticus, and on the other side the monk Theodore of Studium, supported by the Patriarch Nicephorus. Leo commissioned John to prepare material for another ecumenical Council, which took place in 815 at Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The Second Council of Nicaea of 786 was repudiated, and the Council of Hieria of 754 reinstated. As at Hieria the Council had no representatives from the Apostolic sees, and most notably none from Rome. It was in effect a local Council.

There were significant changes. The charges of idolatry were dropped, and the absolute prohibition of images abandoned. (John of Damascus had done his work well). Superstitious practices were forbidden and pictures were allowed to be placed in high positions as long as lights and incense were not offered before them.

In 820 Leo V was assassinated. His successor Michael II allowed orthodox confessors to return, but placed his son, Theophilus, under the tuition of John Grammaticus. The reign of Theophilus (829-842) saw the last persecutions, and his wife, Theodora, who followed him as regent for their infant son, reinstated the images

in 843. This is the "Triumph of Orthodoxy" and is celebrated in the Orthodox liturgy on the first Sunday in Lent.

Very little that was new in argument or cited authority was presented in this period of the controversy; it was more a matter of emphasis. The authorities quoted on both sides were less numerous and added very little of substance. The key biblical text for the iconoclasts was 2 Cor. 5 : 16: "Though we have known Christ *κατὰ σάρκα* yet henceforth know we him no longer "(see above p.81). They took this to mean that the risen Christ cannot be represented in visible form. Theodore's answer was that it means that Christ is now known "apart from sin and not with fleshly affection" (91) Neither interpretation sounds convincing to modern ears. The appeal to traditional usage was very much as before.

The theological issues concerned the attribution of divine grace to images, and the interpretation of the incarnation implied by the veneration of images. John of Damascus had already written:

The saints during their earthly lives were filled with the Holy Spirit, and when they fulfil their course, the grace of the Holy Spirit does not depart from their souls or their bodies in the tombs, or from their likenesses and holy images, not by the nature of things, but by grace and power. (92)

Theodore developed the idea by analysing the relation of the image to the original. The argument is complex. According to Martin (93) he admits that the image of Christ and Christ himself are physically different (*κατὰ φύσιν*) and the divinity in the image is not the divinity of Christ's actual body, but only a relative divinity, as in all created things. However, the image cannot be separated from the original any more than a man can be separated from his shadow. The difference between image and original is not in person, but in substance, the image is only inferior in the material of which it is composed. He comes close to saying that the worship paid to images is the same as that paid to the original, but modifies that by

saying that it is not the wood or paint that is venerated, but the thing signified. The image is more than the sum total of its parts, and it is that remainder which shares a common person (ὁπόστασις). It is that in which the grace inheres. Yet he is careful to say that he does not regard the image of Christ as actually made into God (94)

A major element of the iconoclasts' case was based on Constantine V's view of the nature of the incarnation. That view was met directly by the Patriarch Nicephorus:

In Christ human nature is renewed and saved. The body assumed by God is wholly divinised, transformed ... crowned with indescribable beauty. It becomes Spirit-bearing. It breaks through the heaviness of earthly matter. Very well, yet it does not cease on any of these accounts to be truly body. And if it remains body then it is circumscribed, for that is the very condition, definition, and principle of body.

Elsewhere he writes:

The humanity of Christ, if bereft of one of its properties, is a defective nature, and Christ is not a perfect man, or rather not Christ at all. He is lost altogether if he cannot be circumscribed and represented in art. (95)

Theodore wrote in similar vein, echoing the earlier period by claiming that though God is uncircumscribed the incarnate Christ is circumscribed, otherwise the incarnation is robbed of its meaning. Even if Christ was not a man, but "Man" (as some iconoclasts held), it is still true that he was in fact visible, and circumscribed and capable of depiction; and in any case the particular is always present in the general. The iconoclasts' argument led either to a conflation of the two natures, which is monophysitism; or else to a denial of Christ's true manhood, which is docetism.

It is tempting to say that these were the arguments that won the day, and in a sense it is true. The influences at work in the vindication of the images under Theodora were, however, as much political as theological. She herself, and her mother, were loyal devotees of images, despite the opposition of Theophilus. It seems likely that before his death he had sensed the possibility of a

revolt from orthodox sources. Furthermore, in one of those ironies of history, his military failures were being attributed to his anti-iconic religious opinions. After his death the influence of the Studite monks on Theodora's mother, the fear of a rising, together with her own inclinations, conspired to make her decide that the restoration of orthodoxy would be a politic move. A formal Council was held at Constantinople, and the restoration celebrated on the first Sunday in Lent 843.

The relation of the Church to the Emperor is a theme that runs through the entire period. Both John of Damascus and Theodore refused to accept the Emperor's authority per se in matters of doctrine or liturgical practice. John was particularly pointed, as two passages from the second Apology indicate:

What right have Emperors to style themselves lawgivers in the Church? What does the holy apostle say? "And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers and shepherds, for the building up of the body of Christ". He does not mention Emperors .. Political prosperity is the business of Emperors; the condition of the Church is the concern of shepherds and teachers.

The Manichaens wrote the Gospel according to Thomas; will you now write the Gospel according to Leo? I will not permit a tyrannical Emperor to plunder priestly concerns.(96)

Such sentiments, and Imperial reactions to them, are not related to the substance of the theological arguments, and it is not easy to assess the part they played in the course of events. The conflict between sacred and secular authority in the Church recurs frequently in the history of the Church to the Reformation and beyond, and controversies fought not just on the merits of the specific issues, but also as a trial of strength. In ages when divine judgement or blessing was seen as God's response to human sin or virtue, and was experienced concretely through successes or failure of the army or the harvest, religious matters could be seen as very much the concern of the earthly Prince, and related to "political prosperity".

The problem, whether one is thinking of Constantine V or Henry VIII, is to distinguish political expediency from religious sincerity. In the case of Theodora the two appear to have coincided.

Another point was present in the arguments, did not feature strongly, yet is worth noting. It is that images can do what words cannot. That is not to say that words are superfluous, but that in certain circumstances they are not as effective in conveying an experience or an idea, or a truth, as a visual image or symbol. Among the testimonies of the Holy Fathers at the end of the first Apology, John of Damascus quotes a sermon of St. Basil the Great on the martyr Barlaam:

Now arise, you renowned painters of the champion's brave deeds, who by your exalted art make images of the general. My praise of the crowned champion is dull compared with the wisdom that inspires your brush with its radiant colours. I will refrain from writing further of the martyr's valour, for you have crowned him and I rejoice today at the victory won by your power. (97)

John does not draw the implied conclusion that the image here is superior to the words, but goes on to say that because he is human he needs to see the saints and their deeds as well as to hear them.

The Fathers of the Council of Nicaea made the point:

By means of these two ways which complete one another, that is by reading and by the visible image, we gain knowledge of the same thing. (98)

If one completes the other, then both are essential, and not only for the illiterate.

Chapter 6. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WEST: Charlemagne to the Reformation

With the triumph of Orthodoxy, the position of images in the worship and devotion of Eastern Christendom was secure, and the guidelines for their theological exposition were firmly laid down. The position in the West was less clear. Images were present and had not evoked much discussion. They were seen by people like Paulinus of Nola, writing in the 5th century, as aids to devotion, and "books for the unlettered".(99) But the Western Church had never had to defend the images. It had not experienced to any marked degree either the Christological controversies that had wracked the East, or attack from Islam. This may account for the general reluctance of the Popes to become involved on one side or the other of what was not a live issue in the West.

Charlemagne and the Libri Carolini. The arguments about images which arose in the eighth century are better seen as reactions to Nicaea II, than as arising from concerns within the Western Church itself. A copy of the proceedings of the Second Council of Nicaea was brought to Rome, and a very poor translation was made, which Pope Adrian I sent to Charlemagne. This misleading version gave Charlemagne and the Frankish court the impression that the Empress Irene and her bishops had insisted on the worship of images, with threat of anathema on any who abstained. The official reaction was contained in the so-called Libri Carolini of 790, and can be summed up in a sentence from its Preface: "We refuse with the first Council (Heiria) to destroy images, or with the second (Nicaea) to worship them" (100) Images were to be accepted within the church as ornaments, and as reminders to the faithful of the heroism of the saints. There is little evidence to suggest that Charlemagne's theologians understood the real issues of the controversy. They were perhaps also influenced by the personal hostility of Charles

towards Irene for her refusal to restore the Papal patrimonies and the dioceses of Southern Italy and Illyricum to Roman jurisdiction. This made him ready always to find Constantinople in the wrong.

The position expressed in the Libri Carolini was similar to that already stated by Gregory the Great in his response to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles 595-600. The bishop had found pictures in his diocese being worshipped, and had them ejected. Gregory wrote:

A picture is introduced into a church that the illiterate may at least read what they see on the walls, though they may not be able to read the same in writing. You should, therefore, my brother, have preserved the pictures while safeguarding them from popular worship. (101)

Thirty years after the publication of the Libri Carolini, Claudius, bishop of Turin c817, went even further than Serenus. He not only attacked images, but any visible sign of Christ's life, including the cross; he opposed pilgrimages, and denied the intercessory power of the saints. It is perhaps significant that he was influenced by Spanish adoptionists, who were in turn influenced by the presence of Muslims in Spain, and wanted to present what they saw as a pure and rational Christianity, as their Eastern iconoclast counterparts had done. In the ensuing debate, in which the attack was led by the monk Dungal and Jonas of Orleans, the Carolingian theologians moved much closer to the position of Nicaea, and opened the way for a great increase in the production of sacred images.

These images were more commonly of the saints than of Christ, and were part of a system of intercession that was linked with relics and associated with the doctrine of the healing power of the saints and the effectiveness of their intercession. It was inevitable that superstitious reverence and practice gathered round them, against which the Reformers eventually reacted. (102).

From this point to the Reformation three influences can be seen at work, which in general terms might be said to derive from morality,

spirituality and theology.

Bernard of Clairvaux. The first, and most straightforward, is associated with St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1155). His argument was not against images as such, but against their extravagant multiplicity and ostentation. Rich patrons were donating pictures and statues to churches and especially to monasteries, partly, one suspects, for the payment of Masses for their souls, and partly to secure indulgences. Bernard saw this dependence on lavish giving for salvation as a danger to the spiritual life, both in its emphasis on externals, and in its marked contrast to the poverty that was in keeping with the teaching of the Gospels. The danger was not only present for the donors but also for the recipients. Bernard was also conscious of the poverty of the common people and saw the richness of the images in the churches and monasteries as an intolerable contradiction.

The mystical tradition. A second influence came from the mystical tradition of the late Middle Ages. Again, it was not an argument against images as such, but the setting forth of a mystical ideal in which visual images, and indeed verbal expression, become unnecessary as man's communion with God becomes perfect. Bonaventura (1221-1274) describes that communion in the following ways:

In this immeasurable and absolute elevation of the soul, forgetting all created things and liberated from them, thou shalt rise above thyself and beyond all creation, to find thyself within the shaft of light that flashes out from the divine, mysterious darkness. (103)

Writing a little later, Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293-1382) reverses the spiritual imagery, but says much the same thing:

But in the possession of God, the man must sink down into that imageless nudity which is God. (104)

However, that final condition of imageless communion with God was seen by the mystical tradition as the end of a process, a spiritual progression in which there is a proper place not only for mental

images, but for physical images too. Van Ruysbroeck again:

... for God is a Spirit, of whom no one can make to himself a true image. Certainly in this exercise a man should lay hold of good images to help him, such as the Passion of Our Lord, and all those things that may stir him to greater devotion. (105)

Material images are surely implied in "... all those things that may stir him to greater devotion".

Soon after this was written the anonymous author of the Theologia Germanica was expressing similar ideas. He went on to say:

Tauler says, There be some men at the present time who take leave of images too soon, before truth and knowledge have shown them the way thence. (106)

This is taken to mean that it is dangerous too soon to abandon the world of mediating images which the Church offers to devotion.

Hugh and Richard of the Abbey of St. Victor, writing in the early twelfth century, had already expressed the Platonic understanding of a progression, or ascent, in which the image has a proper, if preliminary, place.

The mystical tradition does not suggest that matter is tainted and that sensible images are therefore evil, but that in the end the spirit must free itself from the physical. The physical has its place but must finally be superceded by the spiritual. The theologians of Nicaea would doubtless have agreed.

Thomas Aquinas. So too, did Thomas Aquinas, from whose writing the third influence, the theological, can be illustrated. It must be noted, of course, that these matters did not feature largely in his writings, which may suggest that they were not very contentious at the time and the references tend to be scattered.

Thomas Aquinas shows his sympathy with the mystical tradition in his comment about idolatry, in which he rates "interior worship" more important than "exterior" worship:

... the interior worship of God by faith, hope and charity is far more important than the services of religion. Denial of the

Christian faith, despair, and hatred of God, which are opposed to interior worship, are more serious sins than idolatry, which is opposed to God's exterior worship. (107)

However, the visual elements of "exterior worship" are nonetheless important. With Gregory the Great and the Carolingian theologians he saw the value of images in helping worshippers to remember and be impressed by the heroism and holiness of the saints. He even implied they had an equal place with the written or spoken word:

Dionysius says that divine matters cannot be revealed to men except under certain images apparent to the senses. Now these very images have a more potent effect upon the mind when they are not merely expressed in words ... but made present to the senses as well by means of visual images of the realities concerned. (108)

As well as approving the presence of images within the worshipping life of the Church, Aquinas addressed himself to the question of their status and the kind of devotion which might properly be associated with them. At many points he echoes both Theodore of Studium and John of Damascus, whom he quotes several times as "Damascene". He makes clear that religion does not offer worship to images as things in themselves (which would be idolatry) but as "images drawing us up to God. Motion to an image does not stop there at the image, but goes on to the thing it represents". (109)

His main concern, however, is with the worship paid to images of Christ, which he deals with in the section headed "The reverence due to Christ" (Summa 3a : 25)

In his first question: "Are Christ's divinity and his humanity to be paid one and the same reverence?" we are reminded of the Eastern debate on the relation of the human and divine in Jesus. He answers in the affirmative. There may be different reasons for honouring Christ, some reasons deriving from his divinity, some from his humanity, but he is one person and not two, and he is to be paid the same reverence:

In Christ there is only one person, of both divine and human nature, and since there is one hypostasis and one existing being, it follows that from the point of view of the person venerated, one reverence and one honour is paid to him. (110)

The second question seeks to press the point: "Is his flesh to be paid divine worship?" He acknowledges that no created things should be accorded the worship proper only to God, and on that basis it might appear wrong to pay divine worship to Christ's flesh. However, that is to forget Christ's uniqueness as the incarnate Word:

To venerate the flesh of Christ (carnem Christi) in this sense is nothing else than to venerate the incarnate Word of God, just as to honour the clothing of a king is nothing else than to adore the king as clothed. This form of veneration of Christ's humanity is divine worship (adoratio latriae).

... For divine worship is paid the humanity of Christ, not for its own sake, but because of the divinity to which it is united, and in terms of which Christ is not less than the Father. (111)

Having established the principle that the created flesh of Christ can be offered divine worship, because the flesh clothes the incarnate Word to whom the worship is thereby offered, Aquinas develops the argument to include images of Christ: "Should the image of Christ be paid 'adoratione latriae'?" Quoting Basil through the writing of John of Damascus, he points out the established view that honour paid to an image is paid to the original. It is absolutely wrong to pay honour to an image as a piece of carved or painted wood, but when the image is seen as pointing beyond its material components to Christ himself, and the worship is directed through to Christ, then that image can be paid divine worship. He includes reproductions of the cross and the relics of the saints in the same category as images. Veneration is due to them because of the ones whom they represent and to whom that veneration is thereby directed. In this regard St. Thomas is not much at variance with John or Theodore in a careful justification of the proper use of images in Christian devotion.

The Council of Trent. However, the scruples of Bernard, the aspirations of the mystics, and the careful definitions of Aquinas,

were not universally shared or understood. What Léonard calls "the religion of the masses"(112) was often distant from the formal teaching of the Church. It is clear that the Reformers' charges of idolatrous practices were not without foundation in popular devotion. Wyclif and Huss had already preached powerfully against such abuse. The Council of Trent tried to regularise the use of images and in so doing to suppress the abuses. In the Decrees of its twenty-fifth Session (1563) the Council affirmed belief in the intercession of saints and therefore in the propriety of invoking them and of honouring their relics and images. The heart of the Tridentine position is summed in the Profession of Faith, promulgated in the Bull Injunctum Nobis of Pius IV in 1564:

I hold unswervingly that ... the Saints who reign with Christ are to be venerated and invoked; that they offer prayers to God for us and that their relics are to be venerated. I firmly assert that the images of Christ and of the ever-Virgin Mother of God, as also those of other Saints, are to be kept and retained, and that due honour and veneration is to be accorded them. (113)

The Decree of the Council was careful to point out that, as for the images of Christ, Mary and the Saints

... due honour and veneration is to be given, not because it is believed that there is in them anything divine or any power for which they are revered, nor in the sense that something is sought from them, or that a blind trust is put in images as once was done by the gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honour which is shown to them is referred to the original subjects which they represent. Thus, through these images which we kiss and before which we kneel and uncover our heads, we are adoring Christ and venerating the saints whose likeness these images bear. (114)

Much is clearly owed in this to the writing of Aquinas. It still largely represents the Roman view today, though the emphasis, in veneration of the saints, is now towards the work of Christ in the lives of the saints.

However, the Reformers were not so much concerned with the niceties of Thomist theology, but with what ordinary people were actually doing and believing, much of which was in their view, sub-Christian

and idolatrous, and which the official Church was doing little to amend. Such abuses were not new, and we have noted them in earlier sections. Owen Chadwick comments:

Since the darkest ages peasants had consumed the dust from saints' tombs or used the Host as an amulet or collected pretended relics or believed incredible and unedifying miracles or substituted the Virgin or a patron saint for the Saviour. In 1500 they were ardently doing these things. What was new was not so much the practice as the way in which the leaders of opinion were beginning to regard it. (115)

The Free Church tradition has its roots in the Reformation, and that tradition's attitude to images has been coloured by the Reformers' assumptions about images and the practices associated with them. Only comparatively recently has there been a rediscovery of the image in Free Church worship, and a questioning of earlier judgements. To that process we now turn.

Chapter 7. FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE PRESENT DAY - The rediscovery of the image.

Reaction in Europe: Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. The Reformation released a flood in which centuries of pent-up political and religious frustration and opposition to the spiritual and temporal authority of Rome and traditional doctrine found an outlet, all too often violent and intolerant. A torrent of words and actions followed, which are very difficult to catalogue.

So far as images are concerned one can say that in many places where Protestantism prevailed their use was opposed, and they were destroyed, often very violently. There was some popular opposition to this new iconoclasm, but not as much as might have been expected, given their widespread use in the devotion of ordinary people only a short time before.

Frenzied attacks on paintings, statues and windows were often stirred up by the fanatical preaching of men like Carlstadt in Germany, Farrel and Viret in France and Switzerland. Carlstadt, for instance, declared:

Images are an abomination, and in putting our faith in them we too become abominable. Our churches could justly be called the abodes of assassination, for there our souls are massacred. (116)

It is easy to see how the images had come to represent a visual symbol of the Roman Church, so that their destruction served as a gesture which satisfied the need to do something as a protest, as a modern demonstrator may stone the Embassy of a nation whose actions he bitterly opposes. But what had the Reformers themselves to say specifically about images?

Luther showed little interest in regulating the external forms of worship:

If one church does not wish, of its own accord, to imitate another in these external matters, what need is there to constrain it by conciliar decrees? (117)

He did, nevertheless, publish a treatise on the liturgy in 1523, and wrote an order of worship the next year, which he called a mass (Deutsche Messe und Ordnung des Gottesdienst). Altar candles, sacred ornaments and vestments were retained. No specific reference was made to images; and their veneration, together with other Catholic devotions, was gradually abandoned without any action on Luther's part.(118) It is significant, however, that in his catechism he omitted the second commandment, which he considered valid only for Jews. He also encouraged the illustration of prayer books as can be seen from his comment in a preface to a prayer book published in 1545:

It seems good to me to include the old (illustrated) passion booklet in this prayer book, especially for the sake of children and simple folk. Through images and parables they are more deeply motivated to remember the divine stories than simply by words and teaching. (119)

This, of course, was in the area of private devotion. A major contribution to public worship was his provision of moving hymns and chorales which, it may be argued, supplied some of the emotional outlets once found in the veneration of images. It is possible that the heavy ornateness of much of the music and the richness of the imagery in Luther's hymns reflect the same instinct that produced the rich and heavily decorated Baroque churches of Catholic Europe.

Zwingli did not write much about images. It is clear that he wanted their suppression, together with the Mass; but he also wanted to restrain destruction, rather because of the lack of order it demonstrated than for any safeguarding of the images themselves.

It was Calvin who devoted particular attention to the place of images in Christian devotion. Chapters 11 and 12 in the first book of the Institutes of the Christian Religion are given over to a lengthy discussion in which all images as used in the Roman Church are seen as nothing less than idols, and therefore to be condemned.



He based much of his arguments on the second commandment, and on passages in Isaiah where idols, together with their makers and worshippers, are mocked. He rejected the argument that images are books for the illiterate, on the ground that as it is neither right nor possible to make an image that in any way approximates to God, all that may be learnt is "frivolous and false". He claimed that the distinction between δουλεία (service) and λατρεία (worship) (120) is false, and in any case too subtle for the ordinary worshippers to comprehend, let alone consciously distinguish as they worship. The reasoning of the second Council of Nicaea (which he knew only from Carolingian sources) he dismissed with ridicule. He was not prepared to accept the idea that it is not the image itself, but the one represented, who is worshipped:

And there is no difference whether they simply worship an idol, or God in the idol. It is always idolatry when divine honours are bestowed upon an idol, under whatever pretext this is done. (121)

Another element in Calvin's resistance to images is the notion that the Word and the sacraments are sufficient, and do not need adding to. A Catholic commentator has summarised the position:

It is not necessary for man to attempt to know or to reveal divinity by means of his own works or his own images. The means that God Himself has given man, in His Word, are fully sufficient and efficacious. (122)

Calvin's view was certainly that the existence and importance of images in Christian devotion was a consequence of inadequate preaching. One might suggest that the sermon is one of man's "own works", every bit as much as an image. The answer would be that the sermon is the result of Spirit-inspired reflection on God's Word. The Orthodox would say exactly the same about the icon, which was painted in the context of prayer and fasting.

On a less serious level Calvin complained that images as seen in the churches were immodestly dressed, worse than prostitutes in a brothel, he claimed. The only images acceptable to him were of

"objects visible to our eyes", and they would serve no useful purpose in the church. They would, in any case, distract the attention which is rightly due to the Word and sacraments "with which our eyes ought to be more attentively engaged". This illustrates a feature which seems to have been present in Protestant disquiet about images, and that is the lure of sensuality. This even applied to music in some quarters. So Viret was prepared for a person to sing and play "... if he has the skill, and without sensual indulgence". (123) It was part of the "world-denying" element in Protestantism, which in fact has roots going back much further (cf. Augustine Confessions Book X, xxxiii 49-50).

It was Calvin's writings that provided a reference point and authority for most of the Protestant iconoclasts.

Reaction in England: Henry VIII to Catholic Emancipation. The influence of the Continental Reformers found its way to England very early. By 1521 enough of Luther's writings were known to be circulating in London to provoke a public burning of his books outside St. Paul's. In the official attitude towards images it is possible to see a swing from a Lutheran position towards that held by Calvin. It can be most clearly illustrated in the change apparent in the process that led to the final form of the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion. The first attempt of the English Church to state its position was formulated in the Ten Articles of 1536, in which images were to be retained as "the kindlers and stirrers of men's minds", (124) but idolatry was to be avoided. By the time the Thirty Nine Articles reached their final form in 1571, Article 22 read (and still reads):

The Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Reliques, and also invocation of Saints, is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.

Such an attitude was not new in England. Wyclif had opposed the abuses

as well as the extravagant ostentation of much devotion attached to images. Colet, as Dean of St. Paul's from 1504, preached "... the exclusive authority of scripture .. and a kind of Wyclifism hostile to the worship of images and the wealth of the Church." (125) Erasmus added his voice:

I am not such a fool that I need carved or painted images which often hinder my worship, since among the rude and stupid masses these figures are honoured as though they were saints themselves."
(126)

The Ten Articles had been intended to hold together the party of the "Old Learning", who wanted to keep things much as they had been before, only independent of Rome; and the party of the "New Learning" who wanted reform of doctrine and practice. Though the King remained in many ways conservative (at his death he left money for a thousand masses to be said for the repose of his soul), his attack against the monastic houses, promoted by Cromwell, with its accompanying iconoclasm, made it easy for the words about avoiding idolatry to be quickly translated into action against any images or shrines that attracted offerings or pilgrimages. As early as 1536, in such a distant place as Exeter and its surrounding villages, destruction began. In the case of the removal of valuable treasures from the parish church of Rewe, for example, the villagers responsible defended their action by reference to what they claimed were Royal injunctions which "had been sent into all shires":

Amongst which injunctions it was commanded that all images standing in any church, church-yard, or other hallowed place, to which said image any offerings, idolatry, or other oblation were made or done unto, should be pulled down and taken away within a convenient time. (127)

Their defence was upheld in the Court of Chancery when they were sued by the lessee of the Rewe parsonage.

The Catholic and Protestant arguments which such actions provoked were similar to the arguments in the iconoclastic controversy. The Catholics defended images as books for the unlettered, as inspiring

imitation of the virtues of the saints, and as reminders of the debt men owe to Christ. They denied that the images were worshipped in themselves, but that appropriate honour was given to God, and appropriate honour to the saints, to whom the images pointed.

The Protestant reply in England took up many of the themes developed by Calvin. Christ is properly understood as both God and man. As it is impossible to portray his Godhead, any picture or image of him is defficient, and therefore blasphemous. Furthermore, we cannot make a true image even of his humanity, because we do not know what he looked like. To honour the saints is to deprive God of honour which is his due. True honouring of the saints is to live in charity and generosity to the poor as they did. These views, widely expressed in sermons, are particularly associated with Bishop Ridley, and in the next century, Bishop Ussher. (128)

However, the charge of idolatry and the identification of images with "Papish superstition" was sufficient indictment to justify their banishment from the churches, though despite waves of iconoclasm going on into the seventeenth century, pictures, windows and statues did survive in some places. (129)

With the advent of religious toleration, officially sanctioned image-breaking died out. Because of the fragmentation of the Church, and the independence of the separated denominations, the views of one group were not a threat to the survival of another. Individual churches worshipped and ordered their buildings according to their lights.

The Roman Catholic community decreased very considerably. By the end of the eighteenth century they constituted about one per cent of the population. (130) They had few buildings and what there were were of simple construction. Despite lingering Protestant assumptions about idolatrous worship, the churches were remarkably plain inside.

It is interesting to note, for example, the interior of St. Mary's, Moorfields, a large church built after emancipation. (131) Designed in the basilican form, the altar stood in the apse, flanked on each side by three large candles on ornate stands, and a censer, also on a stand. On the altar itself, on each side of a crucifix, there were three candles. Covering the east wall, behind the altar, was a large Italianate mural of the crucifixion. However, apart from that, there were no other pictures or statues claiming the attention of the worshipper. Images returned under the influence of Irish immigrants, French Catholic refugees (who were welcomed by Parliament with an annual grant of £200,000 for their support), (132) and Anglo-Catholic converts who had travelled in Europe and seen the ornateness of Catholic churches there. Under the influence of the liturgical movement, and more recently the Second Vatican Council, much has been simplified. There has been an increasing emphasis on the place of scripture in worship, on congregational participation, and on educating the laity to facilitate that participation and their spiritual growth.

Within the Church of England, despite Parliamentary control over the Prayer Book and thus its articles and rubrics, it has been possible for wide divergences of view and practice to develop, especially since the Oxford Movement. Many Anglican churches today have within them pictures, crucifixes and even statuary which would never have survived in the sixteenth century.

Developments in the Free Churches. The Free Church picture is complex. In general they maintained a Calvinistic view about images and church decoration. Such views were assumed and rarely debated. Buildings were plain, with the pulpit in central place, and the communion table, if present at all, below the pulpit and very little emphasised. If there were decorations on the walls they would

usually take the form of scriptural texts, often words of praise from the Psalms, or the Ten Commandments. Yet despite the fact that visual images in the form of pictures and statues were absent, alternatives were unconsciously supplied. The need to focus one's faith in something visual and concrete was to a degree met by the place of the Bible, which was often processed in to mark the beginning of worship, often set up, open, on the communion table, and always treated with respect. It would sometimes be decorated and given a special cover to draw attention to it. Although crosses and crucifixes disappeared, hymns were written full of vivid description of Biblical scenes, and especially of the passion of Christ. J.E. Rattenbury, drawing attention to Isaac Watts' hymn "When I survey the wondrous cross" wrote:

What, for instance, is this hymn but a crucifix? Is it not a verbal crucifix, built up of carven words?

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,

Sorrow and love flow mingled down:

Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,

Or thorns compose so rich a crown.

Whether such a picture, created by a devout imagination, is carven of wood or stone, or depicted in colour or words, makes little difference. (133)

An icon is to be treated with respect, and is to be given devout attention because through it one can discern and respond to some aspect of God and his ways with men. A hymn can be seen in a similar way. People are given a picture which stays with them in their memory, and which spurs the response of faith:

Never love nor sorrow was

Like that my Jesus showed;

See Him stretched on yonder cross

And crushed beneath our load!

Now discern the Deity,

Now His heavenly birth declare!

Faith cries out, 'Tis He, 'tis He,

My God that suffers there!

(Methodist Hymn Book 191)

The power of verbal imagery, in this case committed to memory and associated with music and congregational singing giving it an atmosphere of prayer and devotion, was noted fifty years ago by William Temple:

It remains true that any image is inadequate; but what people often fail to observe is that when, instead of making an image out of material things, you make it out of thoughts, if you make it yourself, it will be equally inadequate, and it is just as much idolatry to worship God according to a false mental image as by means of a false metal image. (134)

A similar point was made by an Orthodox commentator more recently:

Protestants, with their emphasis on the spoken word, must realise that words are also icons. Words describe the reality of God and his disclosure of himself through his Son, but those very words can become idols which we worship in lieu of God himself. Theologizing and sermonising can alter language into pseudo-images with no correspondence to divine realities. (135)

The hymns of Wesley and Watts were largely safeguarded from such dangers by being rooted in the Bible, and expressing a genuine and appropriate response to the "divine realities" they expressed. That is perhaps why they have become established in Free Church devotion. One can sense the preciousness of the words which bring Christ vividly to mind and become thereby means of grace, when one feels offended if such hymns are unthinkingly brayed out by people to whom they appear to mean nothing. Any Orthodox would feel the same if an icon were abused.

It is also worth recalling that when Wesley and Watts wrote their hymns many, if not most, of those who first learnt them were not able to read or write. Like the icons, they were books for the unlettered. Many a farm labourer and miner learnt his faith and his Bible through the hymns of the Evangelical Revival.

The sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist continued to be celebrated, but there is no evidence to suggest that the physical elements within them were given any particular emphasis or significance, in the way that the physical presence of the Bible was. As has already been noted, the table itself was often small, overshadowed by a dominant pulpit and set within a cramped communion rail. This itself was a clear visible expression of the subordination of sacrament to Word, despite the eucharistic teaching of men like Wesley. It is natural

to assume that the eucharist in particular suffered because of the reaction to what was considered Catholic idolatry which turned bread and wine into objects of veneration.

The Last Hundred Years. The tradition of plain and unadorned buildings has continued in many smaller evangelical and fundamentalist communities. In the larger Free Churches, however, other developments have taken place. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dissenting chapel, in general, looked quite distinct from the parish church. But in the late Victorian period, as London and the provincial cities of the Midlands and the North expanded into new suburbs, a new phase of Free Church building began, to meet the needs of the well-to-do and respectable suburbanites. Buildings of a gothic style were erected, many of which still stand today and are similar to many an Anglican building. Stained glass windows became common, often as memorials, but sometimes as a principle feature. (136) Plain crosses, free-standing or painted on the wall, were introduced, though often only after bitter argument. All this was not just "aping the Anglicans" as has been commonly said, but illustrated a renewed understanding of the importance of the visual elements within the building, and also a conscious desire to demonstrate that the Free Churches are part of the "Holy Catholic Church" (137)

The work of H.G.Ibberson. Both tendencies can be illustrated from the work of the Baptist architect Herbert George Ibberson (1866-1935). In about 1910 he redesigned the interior of a Baptist chapel at Hunstanton, and included a cross, and windows which depicted nails, a crown of thorns and a crucifixion scene. He expressed his views on the importance of such visual images in a letter written in 1917, to a cousin, a Baptist minister, who was contemplating the rebuilding of his church:

I feel we must insist on the holding up of the Lord in the sermon

as very important, the modern man will more and more be accessible through his brain. This means you must see and hear well ... The difficult thing for me is what are our people to look at (his italics) besides the minister. On the whole I don't think we can run to a chancel, we do not want a sacred screened off place for the altar and its ministrants, where our Lord can be 'made and eaten all day long! ... Neither do I care to seem to worship pipes.

I, in my present mood would carry the roof for its full height and width right on - but put the pulpit on one side and the organ on the other (or both) and have a great cross on the end wall, or a fresco of the resurrection. For thoughts come through the eye though less than through the ear I do not care for the table dead on the end wall - it is not for us an altar of sacrifice. I like your idea of the marble pool of baptism at the end, but it should be dominated by the Cross which belongs to us all.

Ibberson did not always get his way in his desire to incorporate such items, as his letter goes on to indicate, and he demonstrates the Free Church tendency towards cerebral worship (as well as some anti-Catholic asides!) yet the place of visual images was seen as very important. His understanding of the Catholic nature of the Church was shown in 1930, when he designed a Congregational church at Elmers End in South London. On blue fabric behind the communion table were the words JESUS HOMINUM SALVATOR. He justified them by declaring that as Latin was a universal language everyone would know what it meant and " .. it will link all together Quaker, Catholic, Baptist, Independent, Unitarian. Jesus is the Saviour of Man to them all, though as to how they are saved they may all differ, and perhaps none understand." Ibberson's was not a lone voice. (138)

The Liturgical and Ecumenical movements. Such developments are not surprising. The use of visual images in worship has, as we have seen, deep roots in the life of the Church and beyond, in the way human beings have expressed themselves and their understanding of and response to the universe and the divine presence within it. Legislation and enforcement cannot in the end neutralise those needs and drives which gave birth to the images. The last fifty years have seen an accelerating growth in their presence in Free Church

worship and furnishings. Two major influences in that development have been the liturgical movement and the ecumenical movement, together with the increased mobility of people, enabling them to experience traditions of worship not their own, and thus to be exposed to what could become for them new means of grace.

The liturgical movement has made people think again about the nature of worship, and has awakened the churches to the richness of the treasury of Christian devotion through the ages. It started in European Catholicism in the middle of the nineteenth century, but its influence spread to the Church of England, and then to all the major British denominations. Its insights can be discerned in all their recent liturgical revisions.

The breaking down of prejudices which the ecumenical movement facilitated brought Free Church christians in touch with christians of other traditions. The growing respect which developed as each began to recognise the other as genuinely christian and part of the universal Church, enabled people to be more open to the riches and insights in buildings and liturgies of the other traditions. This can be seen, for instance, in the increased sacramental awareness in the Free Churches. Baptism and Holy Communion have been brought into main Sunday services, rather than tacked on to the end as they frequently were. They are seen as acts of the whole church so that the whole congregation is involved in the baptismal vows, and the eucharist is seen as including the significance of a corporate meal. The Fraction has been restored. The current Methodist Service Book, for example, carries the rubric "The minister breaks the bread in the sight of the people (my italics) ..." (page B.14, paragraph 22). The chalice has reappeared on many communion tables, and the congregation is encouraged to watch the offering of the paten and chalice towards the people during the Words of Institution. Even the much-despised

individual glasses are now being seen as enabling people to hold the wine as a focus of meditation before drinking. In such ways the eucharist is having an increased visual impact, and the visual elements inevitably present in modern as in early Church worship are being allowed to speak for themselves.

Contemporary examples. So the liturgical movement has made churches more aware of the richness in the ancient traditions, and sensitive to their modern applications. It has also been concerned with making the laity involved and participating in such awareness. The ecumenical movement has enabled those insights to be increasingly shared. Thus some Free Churches are beginning to open their doors to images. This process can be seen at work very clearly in a Methodist church on Teesside, something made more remarkable by the fact that the roots of many of the congregation go back to Primitive Methodism, which preserved a tradition closer to Whitfield and Calvin than other strands within Methodism.

For many years the congregation has shared in united services in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, including services in the nearby Roman Catholic Church. The inside of the church is dominated by a large and beautifully carved crucifix, set against a coloured mosaic background which suggests light and glory. Many of the Methodists, having come to appreciate the friendship and integrity of the Catholic priests and people, were very moved by the crucifix. Time came when the Methodists wanted to do something about the plain brick wall at the back of their communion table. Alongside ideas about curtaining and panelling, was a suggestion that a life-sized figure of Christ be put there. After long debate and careful consultation among the congregation a temporary figure was commissioned and put in place for a trial period of three months. Many felt uneasy at first, but at the end of the period a large majority of the

congregation voted for its remaining. It has been made permanent, and has been in place three years at the time of writing. (see fig.xxi) Over this period members have testified to its effect on the atmosphere, and its effect on them personally in particular services or at particular moments in their lives.



Fig.xxi. Figure of Christ. Eston Grange Methodist Church Middlesbrough.

Such permanent figures are still comparatively rare. There is a small crucifix in a Methodist Church in Hanwell, London; and in Hall Green Methodist Church in Birmingham there is a large painting of the

crucifixion. It was used very powerfully when it was introduced at a Good Friday service when members of the congregation shared their response to it, but then the only place that could be found for it was on the west wall of the south transept, where only the preacher can see it. A rather startling example of modern metal sculpture can be seen in Fairhill Methodist Church, Cwmbran, S.Wales (fig.xxii). Originally the eyes of the figure were simply holes in the face. This proved very frightening for some of the children, and the effect has been softened by the holes being filled in.



Fig.xxii. Figure of Christ. Fairhill Methodist Church,
Cwmbran, S.Wales.

In some churches stained glass windows from redundant churches have been incorporated into the worship area by being framed and lit from the back and set on a wall. At Sedgefield Methodist Church, County Durham, a window showing Christ blessing the children has been set over the font. In two Methodist Churches in Lancashire, Blackpool Central and Sulyard Street, Lancaster, stained glass reproductions of Holman Hunt's "light of the World" have been placed in their

respective chancels.

In several churches there are tapestries depicting aspects of the local area. In a new Methodist Church in Redditch, Worcestershire, for example, there is a tapestry representing the local needle-manufacturing industry; in the chapel of the Northern Baptist College there is a triptych portraying features on Manchester; and in St. Andrew's Methodist Church, Barnoldswick, in North East Lancashire, the local tapestry is overlaid with a cross of St. Andrew. The process is taken a step further in the Methodist Church in Rosyth, on the Firth of Forth, where there is a very striking mural on the wall behind the communion area. It shows a figure of Christ dominating a landscape of the Rosyth dockyard (fig.xxiii).



Fig.xxiii. Christ over Rosyth. Rosyth Methodist Church,

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Pulpit falls, pictures and models representing the seasons of the Christian year are becoming more common; and candles are being lit for Advent, and less frequently, for Easter. These latter things are by nature temporary, but the fact that they and other examples are being introduced and generally welcomed, is a sign of reduced anti-Catholic prejudice, and also of growing sensitivity to the value of visual elements within worship. And more than that: some people in feeling God addressing them through whatever form the visual image takes in their church, are beginning to experience a little of what the Orthodox have experienced for centuries, though of course by no means the fulness of the iconic experience. Nothing has been lost from their devotional tradition, but something important has been added. In one sense it has been a bringing into the public setting of something true for many individuals who have privately found peace, strength or even an encounter with God, from the pictures in their homes, their bibles, or their devotional literature.

Conclusion. There is as yet no developed "theology of the image", but in some places the power of the image is being felt again. This has been a recent development. At the end of the second world war the Methodist Church produced a book of guidelines for the post-war church building programme. There were no references to specific visual images. It did, however, speak of the sacramental nature of the building itself. Applying the definition of the sacrament as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" to the church building, the authors say:

Dedicated to its sacred purposes the building thus becomes the pledge of a Covenant between God and Man ... By its character and fitness, its order and cleanness, it bears a constant witness to the joy of communion between the Father and His children. (139)

It is a sign of the times that the annual report of the Methodist Church Division of Property being prepared for 1985 is going to give

particular attention to visual imagery within the buildings.

The images are thus beginning to be released from the shackles of Protestant prejudices. There is still some uneasiness about them as people sense their power. Yet, while it is true that in many quarters (largely outside the Church) there is a resurgence of belief in astrology and in the carrying of lucky mascots which indicate that superstition is by no means dead, there seems little danger of a repetition within the Church of pre-Reformation abuses. It is clear that the didactic function of images is still valid. To justify them as "books for the unlettered" is not as intellectually patronising, or as anachronistic, as it may sound in an era of mass education. We have learned anew that more is retained and understood when verbal and visual are put together, than through words alone. Hence the emphasis on visual aids in education and on visual elements in advertising. It is also true that many people read very little, and find words and their articulate use intimidating. A picture is not an intellectual threat. People can respond to it at their own level, and everyone's response is equally valid in so far as it is genuinely their own.

It remains to be seen whether any future set of guide-lines for Free Church building will include "criteria of appropriateness" for figures and pictures. If so, along with references to technical quality, and consistency with biblical and theological insights, a final criterion should perhaps be: "Is this an image which makes the onlookers want to say their prayers?" Such a suggestion might be dismissed on the grounds that responses are subjective, and individuals vary. That was ever so. There will always be those for whom the daffodil of page 7 or the lily or the rose will be just a pretty flower or botanical specimen; yet there will also be those for whom emotions and responses will be evoked that words alone

could not do. It could be argued that for their sake visual images, as unique means of grace, should be allowed. But most important of all is the preservation of the theological truth that mankind is set within the context of a world in which God has been able to make himself known through the physical components of creation, that he "became flesh and dwelt among us", and that the Christian religion is therefore to do with the whole person, body mind and spirit, and is to be experienced and expressed on all these levels.

It began with "That which we have heard, which we have seen, which we have looked upon and touched with our own hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you ..." (1 John 1 : 1-2). That proclamation, in the Free Churches in particular, has been overlaid almost exclusively with words. There may be seen now a reawakening of the need for physical expression, reflecting the truth of Robert Hooke's words with which this study began:

So many are the links upon which the true philosophy depends, of which if one is loose or weak, the whole chain is in danger of being dissolved. It is to begin with the hands and eyes, and to proceed on through the memory, to be continued by the reason; nor is it to stop there, but to come to the hands and eyes again.

Notes

1. Paul Tillich, 'The Meaning and Justification of Symbols'. Religious Experience and Truth. Sydney Hook (ed), p.4
2. Augustine, 'On Christian Doctrine' Book 2. Chap.1. The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (First Series) 1887 Vol.II. p.535.
3. C. Zvegintzov, Our Mother Church, p.15.
4. Frederick Gibberd, 'The Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral'. The Modern Architectural Setting of the Liturgy. William Lockett (ed), p.55.
5. Frederick W. Dillistone, Traditional Symbols and the Contemporary World, p.95.
6. Gibberd, op. cit., p.61.
7. Dillistone, op. cit., p.99.
8. Dillistone, op. cit., p.98.
9. John Taylor, Icon Painting, p.8.
10. Dorothy M. Emmet, The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking, p.108.
11. Emmet. op. cit., p.104.
12. Joseph Gelineau, The Liturgy Today and Tomorrow, Chap.5.
13. Emmet, op. cit., p.4. cf. also Maurice Wiles, 'Is Christianity Credible?' Epworth Review Vol.8, No.1 (1981) p.54: 'Symbolism is a way of pointing to those things that are so deep, so all-pervasive that we cannot step outside them and describe them objectively. And it is a way that by its imaginative power can speak not only to the conscious but also to the unconscious mind'.
14. E. Gombrich, The Story of Art (1978) p.22
15. Ibid.
16. Michael Gough, The Origins of Christian Art, p.48.
17. Community Rule III, Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English (1975) p.79.
18. Community Rule III, Vermes op. cit., p.75.
19. Jean Daniélou, Primitive Christian Symbols, p.43.
20. cf. also passages where the Old Testament expressions referring to Israel are applied to the Church, e.g. Gal.3:29; Jas.1:1; 1 Pet. 2:9 & 10.
21. Gilbert Cope, Symbolism in the Bible and the Church, p.101.
22. Edwin C. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. V, p.70, n.92.

23. Goodenough, op. cit., p.70.
24. Goodenough, op. cit., p.75.
25. Qeheleth Rabba. Quoted by C.E.B.Cranfield, A Theological Word Book of the Bible, p.38.
26. Similar examples are given by Goodenough, op. cit., p.70ff. There is also an example seen on a Coptic textile fragment from Akhim, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and illustrated in Gough, op. cit., p.27.
27. Josephus, Jewish Antiquities. Quoted by Goodenough, op.cit.,p.102.
28. Didache Ch.X Henry Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church (1963) p.90.
29. cf. A. Maillot, Vocabulary of the Bible, A-A von Allmen (ed) p.451, para.5.
30. Ch.50: 14-15, Apochrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, R.H. Charles (ed), Vol.I, p.509.
31. C.Kingsley Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John, p.483.
32. Bettenson, op. cit., p.122.
33. Quoted by Cope, op. cit., p.37.
34. Goodenough, op. cit., p.53.
35. cf. Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, (1974) p.233
36. The Messianic Rule, II, Vermes, op. cit., p.121.
37. Didache Ch.X. Bettenson, op. cit., p.91.
38. Apology Book I, ch.lxvii, Bettenson, op. cit., p.95.
39. Pierre Du Bourguet, Early Christian Painting, p.21.
40. Henry Chadwick, The Early Church, p.280.
41. Gough, op. cit., p.35.
42. Cope, op. cit., p.35.
43. See above page 38.
44. See above page 38ff.
45. cf. Aidan Nichols, The Art of God Incarnate, p.51, referring to the work of Westcott and De Rossi.
46. Du Bourguet, op. cit., p.10.
47. Gough, op. cit., p.39.

48. Jocelyn Toynbee, 'Pagan Motifs and Practices in Christian Art and Ritual in Roman Britain', Christianity in Britain, 300-700, M.W.Barley and R.C. Hanson (ed), p.179.
49. Gough, op. cit., p.15.
50. Nichols, op. cit., p.28.
51. Peter Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', Journal of Roman Studies, lxxi 1971, p.81.
52. Brown, op. cit., p.94.
53. Peter Brown, 'A Dark Age Crisis: aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy', English Historical Review, cccxli 1973, p.12.
54. Peter Brown, The Cult of the Saints, p.4.
55. Brown, op. cit., p.11.
56. Victricious of Rouen, quoted by Brown, op. cit., p.78.
57. Kunstschaten uit de St.-Servaas, (Maastricht 1976). English translation section, headed 'The Church Treasures'.
58. Anneliese Schröder, Introduction to Icons, (Recklinghausen 1967).
59. Brown, op. cit., p.87ff.
60. Brown, 'A Dark Age Crisis', op. cit., p.12ff.
61. Leonid Ouspensky, Theology of the Icon, pp. 196-7:
'The Church piously preserves historical reality in the representation of Christ, the saints and the events of the Bible. To follow faithfully the concrete historical fact is the only way we can achieve a personal contact, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, with the person whom the icon represents. Each characteristic trait of the saint, therefore, will be carefully preserved, and only this fidelity to historical truth allows the iconography of the saints to be so stable. Actually, it is not only a matter of transmitting an image consecrated by tradition, but above all of preserving a direct and living link with the person whom the icon represents. This is why it is essential to abide by an image reproducing to the greatest degree possible the traits of the person. Obviously this is not always possible. Like the biographies of the saints, the physical traits of the saints are often more or less forgotten, and it is difficult to reconstruct them. The likeness therefore risks being imperfect. The unskillfulness of the painter can also lessen it. However, it can never disappear completely. An irreducible minimum always remains which provides a link with the prototype of the icon'.
62. Gerald Downey, Antioch in the Age of Theodosius, p.125. For fuller details see Downey, A History of Antioch in Syria, p.428ff.

63. Quoted by Schröder, op, cit., p.16.
64. Leslie W. Barnard, The Graeco-Roman Background to the Iconoclastic Controversy, p.56.
65. It is suggested by E. J. Martin (A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy, pp.24-5) and others, that Leo III and the iconoclastic bishops, in coming mainly from the Eastern part of the Empire, were influenced by the austere anti-iconic monotheism of their neighbours. However, Peter Brown ('A Dark Age Crisis' op. cit., p.12) counters this by saying that all their training was in Constantinople, that it was the centre of the world, so home influences would have been minimal.
66. L. Ouspensky. Theology of the Icon. New York 1978., p.105.
67. Quoted by Martin, op. cit., p.20.
68. Martin, op. cit., pp.21-22, 29-30.
69. John of Damascus, On the Divine Images, translated by David Anderson (New York 1980), p.35.
70. Nichols, op. cit., p.77. cf also Brown, 'A Dark Age Crisis' op. cit., pp.23-24; Charles Mango, Iconoclasm, A. Buyer & J. Herrin (ed), p.2.
71. Martin, op. cit., p.28.
72. Brown, 'A Dark Age Crisis', op. cit., p.25.
73. cf. Ouspensky, op. cit., p.149ff; Norman H. Baynes, 'Idolatry in the Early Church', Byzantine Studies, p.135.
74. Martin, op. cit., p.47.
75. Ouspensky, op. cit., p.150ff.
76. John of Damascus, op. cit., p.32. Sister Charles Murray points out that the Greek original of the account of the curtain episode has survived. It has a quiet and courteous tone that is lost in the Latin. He did not tear the curtain down in pieces, but directed that it be given to some poor man who had died, as a shroud. He himself arranged for the curtain to be replaced, and apologised for a delay, saying he "felt it better to send to Cyprus for one of the right quality as well as of religious acceptability". What was not acceptable about the original was probably that the figure derived from pagan sources. The Greek speaks of a man-like figure used as an idol: ἀνδροεικέλον τι εἶδωλοειδές. It was a by-stander, and not Epiphanius, who declared the figure to be of Christ or a saint. cf. 'Art and the Early Church', The Journal of Theological Studies, New Series XXVIII, p.336ff.
77. Quoted by Martin, op. cit., p.134.
78. Quoted by Martin, op. cit., p.135.
79. Quoted by Martin, op. cit., p.145.
80. John of Damascus, op. cit., p.26.

81. Ibid, p.63.
82. Martin (op. cit., p.177) suggests he wrote them in Damascus while holding an important hereditary civic office, after which he entered the monastery of St. Sabas near Jerusalem, and was ordained c735. Others suggest that he wrote from St.Sabas. In either case they were written from Muslim territory, which gave John protection from harrassment.
83. John of Damascus, op. cit., p.16.
84. Ibid. p.18.
85. Ibid, pp.25 & 62.
86. Ibid. cf.pp.82-88.
87. Ibid. p.64, cf. also p.36, commenting on a passage from St. Basil the Great, he says: '... the honour given to an image is given to the one portrayed in the image'.
88. Ibid. p.32. cf. p.63ff.
89. Ibid. p.58ff.
90. Nichols, op. cit., p.81.
91. Martin, op. cit., p.192.
92. John of Damascus, op. cit., p.27; also see above p.70.
93. Martin, op. cit., p.186ff.
94. This way of thinking could be seen as a form of rationalising the common and primitive experience of models and images assuming a life or presence of their own, referred to earlier in this thesis.
95. Quoted by Nichols, op. cit., pp.85-86.
96. John of Damascus, op. cit., pp.59 & 63.
97. Ibid. p.35.
98. Quoted by Ouspensky, op. cit., p.166.
99. Martin, op. cit., p.225.
100. Ibid. p.232.
101. Ibid. p.227.
102. For a fuller treatment of this development see above pp.70-74
103. 'The Journey of the Mind of God', VII, 5. Late Medieval Mysticism, Library of Christian Classics Vol.XIII. Roy C. Petry (ed) p.141.
104. 'The Sparkling Stone', II. Late Medieval Mysticism, op. cit.,p.293.
105. Ibid.

106. 'Theologia Germanica', XIII. Late Medieval Mysticism, op.cit., p.335.
107. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae (Blackfriars Edition 1969), Vol.40, p.29 (2a2ae 94,3).
108. Ibid. Vol.29, p.41 (1a2ae 99,3). cf. also Vol.40, p.27 (2a2ae 94,2)
109. Ibid. Vol. 39, p.19ff (2a2ae 81,3).
110. Ibid. Vol.50, p.187 (3a 25,1).
111. Ibid. Vol.50, p.191 (3a 25,2).
112. E. G. Léonard, A History of Protestantism, Vol.1, p.9.
113. Henry Bettenson, op. cit., p.376.
114. The Christian Faith in the Documents of the Catholic Church, J. Neuner & J. Dupius (ed). p.343ff.
115. Owen Chadwick, The Reformation, (1972), p.24. For details of pre-Reformation use and abuse of images in England, see Bernard L. Manning, The People's Faith in the time of Wyclif, pp.97-101, and the article by Robert Whiting, 'Abominable Idols: Images and Image-breaking under Henry VIII', The Journal of Ecclesiastical History, Vol.33, No.1., in which evidence is presented of people soliciting the patronage of Jesus or a saint by setting up a light before the appropriate image, and of statues being bequeathed clothes, jewelry and money as meritorious offerings.
116. Léonard, op. cit., p.78.
117. Ibid. p.108.
118. cf. Owen Chadwick, op. cit., p.430: 'Though the Lutheran mass changed over the years, it changed slowly. In various churches there were lights, vestments, Latin for parts of the service, altars, choirs, liturgical singing, bowing and kneeling, crucifix, images and embroidery. At Frankfurt pre-Reformation missals were still in use at the end of the sixteenth century.'
119. Quoted by Hans-Ruedi Weber, Experiments with Bible Study, (Geneva 1981), p.26.
120. See above p.85.
121. Calvin, The Institute of the Christian Religion, Book 1, Chap.XI, para.9, Library of Christian Classics Vol.XX. J.T.McNeil (ed).
122. J.P.Ramseyer, New Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol.8, p.887.
123. Léonard, op. cit., p.322.
124. E.J.Bicknell, A Theological Introduction to the Thirty Nine Articles, J.H.Carpenter (ed), p.8. hr
125. Léonard. op. cit., p.21.

126. From The Praise of Folly (1511), quoted by Gerhardus Van der Leeuw, Sacred and Profane Beauty, p.184.
 127. Robert Whiting, 'Image Breaking under Henry VIII', The Journal of Ecclesiastical History, 33 (1982), p.43.
 128. cf. C.H. & K.G. George, The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, p.361; and Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England, Vol.1, p. 351ff.
 129. Particularly fine windows can be seen in the church of S.Michael, Doddiscombsleigh, East Devon. Especially remarkable is a representation of the Trinity as three crowned figures.
 130. Alec Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution, p.42.
 131. See the illustration in Bernard Ward, The Eve of Catholic Emancipation, Vol.3, p.178.
 132. Vidler, op. cit., p.43.
 133. J.Ernest Rattenbury, The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley, p.22.
 134. William Temple, Christian Faith and Life (1963), p.32.
 135. C.S.Calian, Icon and Pulpit - the Protestant-Orthodox Encounter, p.135.
 136. A notable example is Fairhaven Congregational Church, (now URC), Lytham St. Anne's, opened in 1912.
 137. When Penge Congregational Church was opened in 1912 its members were told by the visiting preacher that; "... their Church must be Catholic. They should forget that they were Nonconformists in their worship ... and never never forget that they worshipped not as Nonconformists, but as members of the holy family of the Church."
- Quoted by Clyde Binfield, 'English Freechurchmen and a National Style', Religious and National Identity: Studies in Church History, 18. p.519.
138. I am indebted for the information about Ibberson to a paper presented by Dr. Clyde Binfield to a Baptist Summer School in July 1982, and published in a collection entitled: Baptists in the Twentieth Century, (K.W.Clements)(ed), published by the Baptist Historical Society. The material is to be found from page 133 onwards.

For other examples of both the trend to emphasise the visual elements in the buildings, and the growing sense in sections of the Free Churches of being part of the Church Catholic, see Binfield's work quoted in note 137 above, and also : So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920; and 'Bridled Emotion; English Freechurchmen, Culture and Catholic Values', in Britain and the Netherlands Vol.VII: Church and State Since the Reformation, A.C.Duke and C.A.Tamse (ed), (The Hague 1981) p.176-206.

139. E.Benson Perkins and Albert Hearn, The Methodist Church Builds Again, p.76.
Binfield, in Baptists in the Twentieth Century (see above note 138) draws attention to a Baptist publication coming twenty years later in which similar sentiments are hinted at. In Baptist Places of Worship, G.W.Rushing suggests that the only true basis for church architecture is a biblically grounded theology of worship, and that church buildings should express the nature of God, and the means he uses to address us.

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